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ISSUE 63

This issue celebrates the centenary of two great filmmakers, Vincente Minnelli and Yasujiro Ozu; while it has taken a number of years for Ozu's films to be appreciated by English speaking critics, a critical investigation of the director's work, as the Adam Bingham and Robin Wood articles in this issue suggest, is far from exhausted.

Vincente Minnelli's films continue to elude critical attention and serious study. Minnelli is, arguably, one of the most misunderstood and undervalued directors of Hollywood's late classical period. The reasons for this are complex and a full discussion of the issue is beyond the scope of this editorial. However, we would like to list several concerns that account for the difficulties Minnelli has posed for the critics:

- i) ***The Artist***. Minnelli's background in design, the visual arts and musical theatre and his alleged flamboyant personal style, contributed to the perception of him as a dandy and aesthete. The image has been read as connoting frivolousness with Minnelli valuing his artistic vision over content.
- ii) ***The MGM Employee***. Minnelli's twenty-six year affiliation with MGM, the most conservative and wealthy of the major studios, confirmed his role as a spokesperson for the studio's image, values and politics.
- iii) ***Realism***. In a medium that has been strongly identified with realism and privileging an identifiable notion of reality, Minnelli's aesthetics challenge the limits of realist cinema.
- iv) ***Genre***. Minnelli's areas of specialization, the melodrama, the musical and comedy, are genres not valued by masculine criteria. These genres, marked



Some Came Running 1959: One of the great melodramas of the late classical Hollywood cinema.

as they are by excess and extravagance, reinforced the idea that Minnelli was not a serious-intentioned director.

- v) **Emotionalism.** Minnelli's films dramatize the emotional life of the protagonist, expressing interiority and unarticulated needs and desires. Decor is used to externalize emotions and feelings. The director's privileging of emotional states is closer to that of European movements in the arts. The genres Minnelli uses are receptive to overt emotional expression and his handling of them is sophisticated and finely judged. This impedes a realist reading of the films and the orientation that realism solicits.

Vincente Minnelli enters the Hollywood cinema in the early 1940s, a precipitous historical moment, when it is more open to stylization (expressionism and mise-en-scene filmmaking), psychoanalysis and surrealism. His third film, *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), was ground-breaking in the way it darkens a nostalgic, turn-of-the-century musical which ostensibly celebrates the nuclear family and small-town values. Minnelli, in his post-war films, intensifies this exploration, dealing with loneliness, alienation and the needs to assert one's identity in a world that is hostile to the individual and self-expression. This occurs both in the melodramas, e.g., *Undercurrent*, *Madame Bovary*, *The Bad and the Beautiful*, and the musicals, e.g., *The Pirate*, *An American in Paris*, *Brigadoon*. In many of the films, the resolutions, although 'happy endings', convey a sense of the fragile and/or the tentative.

Minnelli's films, in addition to acknowledging the struggle of giving expression to one's identity, recognize the protagonist's basic need to establish a space or community where he or she feels accepted and valued. Minnelli's humanism may be a factor in his longevity in the mainstream cinema, with his films directly addressing concerns that resonated with an audience who accepted and understood the conventions of

classical Hollywood cinema. These conventions work in a complex manner because they can be heightened and artificial while simultaneously communicating direct emotional contact. The celebrated waltz sequence which occurs at an elegant ball in *Madame Bovary* is a case in point. Madame Bovary's anticipation of the event (signified by the elaborate and expensive gown she wears) and her subsequent exhilaration is realized through the use of camera, editing, staging, decor. Her heightened perception of the experience culminates with the waltz and a crescendo that is dramatized through image and sound as windows are smashed when she says that she feels faint.

The sequence expresses Madame Bovary's state of mind while remaining within the parameters of the narrative. The sequence magnificently illustrates Minnelli's artistry as a film melodramatist but it is important to note that his range encompasses a sophisticated humour and a surrealist whimsy which is most evident in the musicals. *Yolanda and the Thief*, *The Pirate* and *The Bandwagon* display a playfulness which is essential to the films' enjoyment and critical reading. Contemporary critics often overlook this level of humour and wit, focussing instead on content and, in doing so, ignore the film's mode of address which leads to a reductive reading of the text. Anyone who values the late films of Renoir (*The Golden Coach*, *French Cancan*) should have no difficulty with Minnelli. It is significant that Minnelli has been celebrated more by European than Anglo-Saxon critics.

As editors we are expressing our appreciation of Minnelli and his films; an appreciation which, while not always evident in much that is written on Minnelli, is found in the work of such cinema-conscious filmmakers as Jacques Demy, Jean-Luc Godard and Martin Scorsese. We hope this issue, designed as a tribute, will invite further consideration of a great artist who has not yet received his due.

Florence Jacobowitz and Richard Lippe

IN MEMORIUM

Undercurrent (1947)
A Minnelli melodrama and one of Katherine Hepburn's best performances.



Roman Holiday (1953)
Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn. Peck demonstrates his skill at romantic comedy.



Being a Clown

CURIOUS COUPLING IN *THE PIRATE*

BY DOUGLAS PYE

The final sequence of *The Pirate* is in some ways conventional and in others very odd. Don Pedro/Walter Slezak has been unmasked as the pirate Macoco and is overpowered on the stage by a bombardment of theatrical props wielded by members of the theatre troupe. He collapses upstage, and the film's central characters, Manuela/Judy Garland and Serafin/Gene Kelly, embrace in triumph. Suddenly a huge close up of Serafin/Kelly erupts onto the screen, looking directly out at us but abstracted from place and space against a black background. As though to acknowledge that the audience might think the whole thing over and be heading for the exits, he calls out, 'Ladies and gentlemen, don't move, don't stir, the best is still to come. We have a new star in our brilliant galaxy of players—the beautiful, the beguiling, the divine Manuela'. There is a dissolve, banners advertising Serafin and Manuela peel away and we move over a cheering audience towards another stage onto which burst Garland and Kelly dressed as clowns, and they launch immediately into 'Be a Clown'.

The sequence fulfills several of the key expectations we will have in watching a Hollywood musical of the studio period. It ends the movie with an uplifting musical number and with the heterosexual couple happily united. As a number presented on a stage by characters who are professional performers 'Be a Clown' also conforms to a central convention of the backstage or 'show' musical by underlining the couple's romantic compatibility through a demonstration of their compatibility as performers—as in song and dance, so in romance. In this sub-genre of the Hollywood musical the confirmation of the performing couple's future together (their acceptance of it and its celebration in the film's world) resolves the two main narrative lines of the film—the problems of the relationship and the problems of the show. But in these as in many other ways *The Pirate* works fascinating variations on the conventions.

1) Although performance is one of the film's central subjects and the ending evokes the world of the backstage musical, overall *The Pirate* does not sit easily in that category (Rick Altman understandably includes it in his category of 'the fairy tale musical' rather than 'the show musical'¹). The film's movement towards a final affirmation of performance and performers is complex and surprising, involving as it does a substitution of Manuela's acceptance of the life of an itinerant performer for her initial fantasy of being carried off by the infamous pirate, Macoco.

2) The major narrative issues have been all but resolved in the previous sequence. Don Pedro has been unmasked

and Serafin has been saved from the gallows with the help of Manuela who performs voluntarily in public for the first time (though pretending to be hypnotized). Her performance of adoration for Serafin/Macoco (he is still publicly identified as the pirate) in the song, 'Love of my Life', is what arouses Don Pedro's jealousy to such an extent that he reveals his identity as the infamous Macoco. The final sequence is, as Serafin/Kelly's address to the spectator indicates, a kind of coda.

3) Structurally its semi-detached status is strongly marked. As Jane Feuer suggests, the cut to close up, the absence of sound carrying over the transition, the break with temporal and spatial continuity, all make the moment unusually jarring². There is a continuity of theatrical setting and of popular performance idiom with the reprise of 'Be a Clown', previously performed by Kelly and the Nicholas Brothers, but we don't know where we are or when this number is taking place.

4) Perhaps oddest of all is the image of the couple the number presents. 'Love of my Life', the previous number, creates a familiar performance of heterosexual romance but here we get something very different. The camera moves past banners promising the 'Serafin the Great' and 'the Divine Manuela' towards a stage. What we get is divine but hardly in the promised sense—Manuela and Serafin as clowns in Cole Porter's wonderfully manic and bizarre celebration of the clown's pulling power with the ladies:

Be a clown, be a clown
All the world loves a clown
Be a crazy buffoon
And the demoiselles'll all swoon
Dress in huge baggy pants
And you'll ride the road to romance
A butcher or a baker ladies never embrace
A barber for a beau would be a social disgrace
They'll all come to call if you can fall on your face
Be a clown, be a clown, be a clown.

This is a strange lyric and these are curious final roles for the heterosexual couple. While the number structurally confirms Manuela and Serafin as both couple and partners in performance, it presents them in the familiar garb of the male circus clown and gives them lyrics that imply a male voice. They perform largely 'side by side', close together, facing in the same direction—out to the audience—and doing very much the same things as they dance. As Richard Dyer notes,



Serafin hypnotizes Manuela.

this is common in vaudeville routines and it is often used by single-sex duos³. Here, as with Astaire and Garland in *Easter Parade*'s 'We're a couple of swells', Garland forms part of a male/female couple both dressed as men⁴. The skill, exuberance and interaction of Kelly and Garland here vividly conjure an image of the mutuality that often characterizes the couple in romantic comedy, and we might also see the number as celebrating perhaps the most problematic of all romantic comedy's recurrent values, the equality of the man and woman. But in a remarkable twist, *The Pirate* creates mutuality and equality in the couple by in effect abolishing sexual difference. In this number the roles the performers play are implicitly male but (regardless of what the lyrics might claim about the romantic appeal of the clown) conventionally the image of the clown is almost asexual.

How the film gets to this extraordinary ending and what it might intend by it are questions that need to take us back to the film's opening.

What we see after a credit sequence that unfolds over a period map of the Caribbean Sea (a staple image of pirate movies), is a book entitled 'The Pirate' that turns out to be some kind of child's picture book of pirates. A manicured female hand opens the book and a voice we can recognize as Judy Garland's reads from the first page of text and then continues as if still reading, although when more pages are turned they consist entirely of pictures. The voice is excited and yearning, seemingly captivated by the romance of piracy conjured by the book: 'Macoco the dazzling, Macoco the

fabulous, the hawk of the sea, the prince of pirates . . .'. The graphic style of the full-page coloured illustrations is a sophisticated version of primitive, offering fantastical images of pirate adventure on the Spanish Main that in style at least seem designed for quite young children. On closer inspection, however, the content of some of the illustrations seems rather at odds with this implied readership: in one a bulky pirate, seen from the back on the deck of a ship, carries three young women, one apparently in her undergarments, over his shoulders and in his arms. Another young woman—also in her underclothes—is bound to the mast of a pirate ship and the heads or upper bodies of two more jut out from the deck's open hatches. A later illustration shows a pirate on shore, with his arm round one young woman and a second sitting on his shoulder. Pirate stories, with their stirring worlds of male adventure and freedom from constraint, conventionally appeal to boys. The best, like *Treasure Island*, more or less dispense with women altogether. *The Pirate* inflects the material strikingly from the outset: the reader is female and the fantasy has distinctly sexual undertones—muted by the style of the illustrations—of female subjection to the violent power of the pirate. In these representations sexual difference is emphatic and presented in ways that centre on extreme versions of the conventional relationships between gender and power.

As the book is closed, the camera pulls back from the close up and we get our first view of the film's characters and setting. This is a moment often greeted by guffaws in

Manuela arrives in Port Sebastian.



student screenings and certainly what we see and hear is comically disconcerting. Here is Judy Garland, still rapt in her pirate fantasy but now urgently intoning her own words: 'Macoco, where are you now, what seas do you traverse, is it sunrise or sunset where you are?', as she stares into the middle distance, past the camera, from a terrace framed by foliage draped trellis and crammed with young women costumed in an eclectic and fantastical version of early nineteenth century Central American style. The design foregrounds artifice at every level, from the obviously studio setting (Minnelli chose not to shoot on location and the only non-studio footage in the film are two brief but significant shots of the sea when Manuela visits Port Sebastian) which tightly encloses the young women, to the lighting, colour and costume. Its comic dimension is perhaps most evident in the extravagant head-ware, including perilously tall turban-like creations in a variety of patterned fabrics and, most noticeably, Garland's weird tartan bonnet. This is a world that for British audiences might evoke pantomime. Performance style too is extravagantly and comically stylized. Minnelli and his team could not announce their playful engagement with artifice and convention more emphatically.

At the same time this wacky version of a familiar Hollywood genre milieu is tightly focused on Manuela's strange fantasies and their context. In an environment which is created as stiflingly conventional, it seems as though Manuela refuses to be socialized into acceptable young womanhood. While she dreams of Macoco her companions vehemently reject the vision of being carried off by pirates in favour of the practical but unromantic ambition of marriage to a respectable and suitably prosperous husband. The claustrophobic design and framing of the balcony, the conspicuous black cross round Manuela's neck

and the rigid conformity of her friends all sketch in the material circumstances that both produce her fantasies of escape and constrain their nature. Manuela is another version of Garland's child-woman, her maturity of voice and figure strongly connoting emergent adult sexuality while aspects of her performance (the intensity with which she evokes Manuela's identification with the vision of Macoco and the urgency of delivery that dramatizes its reality to her) root the character in childhood. She remains unconscious of her own sexuality and that of her fantasies, which have a distinctly masochistic quality.

The major movement of the film is from Manuela's adolescent dream of willing subjection to the marauding Macoco, a dream in which she remains completely passive as the pirate swoops down on her, to her active and equal role in a performing duo. The juxtaposition of opening and ending indicates a scale of transformation much more extreme than the change required of the couples in most musicals and romantic comedies: Serafin is not Macoco and performance is not piracy. The terms of Manuela's desire have to be radically revised.

But three features of her initial dream remain. One is the great constant of romantic comedy, the heterosexual couple, though the ways in which the couple is defined undergoes dramatic change over the course of the film. A second is escape from the suffocating environment of her home to a life of constant travel and adventure. And the third is the energy invested in and released by dream itself, the characteristic identified by Thomas Elsaesser in his formative article on Minnelli as a defining feature of Minnelli's protagonists⁵. In *The Pirate* Manuela's fantasy of Macoco opens the film and establishes an initial register of representation and desire. But in more covert ways, too, the power and energy of Manuela's desire also initiate the first movements of the narrative.

As she remonstrates with her friends for their lack of soul the group is interrupted by a voice calling Manuela, and her Aunt Inez/Gladys Cooper, dressed totally in black, rushes in with news that she has found Manuela a husband. The friends are hugely excited, Manuela utterly deflated ('Is it anyone I know?'). The lucky man is Don Pedro Vargas, the new mayor, prosperous enough to excite the envy of Manuela's friends. He is introduced in the next scene and turns out to be played by the splendid Walter Slezak as a figure so corpulent and unromantic that it would be difficult to imagine anyone further from Manuela's fevered fantasies. Even the hopes Manuela begins to entertain that the marriage might at least allow her to travel are firmly squashed by Don Pedro's determination to remain quietly at home. We know of course that Manuela is not going to end up with Don Pedro and that Garland and Kelly will eventually form the romantic couple. The marriage plans will somehow be disrupted as part of the pleasurable complications of plot that are conventional in such films. For the moment, though, Manuela seems utterly powerless as a dutiful niece subject to the rigid hierarchies of her society: an arranged marriage to an unromantic pillar of the community; no love, no romance, no freedom, no travel; collapse of dreams.

The film's ironic complication will turn out to be that Don Pedro is Macoco, now retired comfortably but anonymously to this obscure village, some distance from the sea. In other words, Manuela's dream is answered—she calls for Macoco and he appears—but not at all in the form she imagined. At the literal level of the narrative Aunt Inez's appearance with news of the betrothal as Manuela fervently evokes Macoco is the merest coincidence. But in the symbolic order of the film, with a logic familiar in many Hollywood movies, her appearance responds to Manuela's desire. In a way that parallels genies out of bottles and other wonders in more obviously magical tales, Manuela 'calls up' Macoco and, hey presto, he appears and is hers. Manuela is about to get what she thinks she wants but it is not in the least what she desires. This is a key mechanism for the whole film, a source of much comic incident but also central to the implicit critique of Manuela's fantasies that the film is setting up.

The poetic logic by which Manuela's desire can call forth its object (though in unexpected and even undesirable forms) has a further dimension dramatized in Gene Kelly's spectacular first appearance. Aunt Inez has agreed to take Manuela to Port Sebastian to greet her trousseau as it arrives by ship from Paris, and to allow Manuela to glimpse the Caribbean before she is immersed in her marriage to Don Pedro. The scene opens on the bustle of the harbour, with the camera on a ship as cargo is lifted by crane from the hold. In the second shot, the camera tilts down to a crate showing Manuela's name and that of the fashion house, Maison Worth, Paris. As the crate is hauled away, a figure, seen from the back, enters the space it has vacated and, as the camera tilts up to follow the movement, clambors effortlessly up and onto the crate as it is hoisted high above the quay. From this vantage point Serafin/Kelly, supremely confident, announces to the crowd below the forthcoming



Minnelli and Garland on the set of *The Pirate*.

attractions to be offered by his troupe of traveling players.

Having introduced the Garland character, the film moves to Kelly for his extended introduction but the narrative shift is bridged through Serafin's immediate association with the romance of Paris (one of the places Manuela longs to visit) and with the impending marriage which threatens to imprison her forever. Serafin's appearance out of the hold with Manuela's trousseau has almost the literal force of a genie's eruption into the story. Serafin is the other half of what Manuela's desire calls up: on the one hand Don Pedro/Macoco who is nothing like the pirate Manuela longs for; on the other Serafin who is not Macoco but who from his first appearance is much closer to the picture book representation of the romantic buccaneer and to Manuela's dream abductor. She summons up two opposed versions of Macoco: Don Pedro, who is the person she wishes for but not the image; and Serafin who is the image but not the person.

In between the Don Pedro scene and Serafin's arrival is a muted encounter between Manuela and her aunt in which some of the film's central thematic terms are made explicit. Manuela tells her aunt that she accepts her lot and will be a good wife. 'I know', she says, 'that there is a practical world and a dream world. I know which is which and I shan't mix them, I promise'. For Manuela this represents the defeat of desire and a sad acknowledgement that dream and reality cannot be made to coincide. But she longs to see the Caribbean Sea just once and Aunt Inez acquiesces. It's at the port that she will encounter Serafin and the film's rather different view of relationships between dream and reality will begin to open up.

At Port Sebastian, once Serafin's exhibitionist display on top of the crate is over, we meet his troupe of actors and the film moves towards its first musical number. Serafin is one of Kelly's most extraordinary creations, pushing the confi-

dence and irrepressible energy that are central to his star persona into hyperbolic regions of sexual arrogance, exhibitionism and narcissism. His number, 'Niña', combines all these in a display that simultaneously parodies the sexual charms and athleticism of Hollywood's swashbuckling stars and establishes a persona for Serafin as extreme in its way as Manuela's masochistic fantasy. He greets each young woman he meets with, 'Niña', the Spanish for 'girl', and the song, which features some of Cole Porter's most ingenious (some would say strained) rhymes (Niña, neurasthenia, meanya, gardenia, schizophrenia . . .) celebrates the irresistibility and the total interchangeability of women for Serafin. At the same time, while the absurdity of Serafin's inflated ego is comically displayed in Kelly's performance, this is also the film's first presentation of the power of performance to transform mundane reality. Serafin makes the town centre his stage, climbing into houses, in and out of balconies and windows, then taking over the square with the dance finale.

Masochistic dream and narcissistic performance, equally based in fantasy but both embraced with tremendous energy, are the opposed forces initially embodied by the two protagonists. Romantic comedy frequently begins by defining the gender roles or assumptions of one or both of the central couple as in some way unacceptable and dramatizes the changes the pair need to undergo before they can become fully a couple. Often in Hollywood comedy the man needs to change more than the woman in order to become a fitting partner for her⁶. Sometimes the process is more balanced and reciprocal and there is a process of mutual re-education⁷. Processes of re-education are often also intertwined with the motif of disguise. In Shakespeare's comedies there are famous examples of characters literally disguised and sometimes cross-dressed—young women pretending to be men—with disguise forming a crucial part of the elaborate play with identity, gender and social role that the plays enact. In Hollywood romantic comedy, which inherits and reworks the conventions of theatrical tradition, literal disguise is not all that common and cross-dressing even rarer. More often we need to think of the motif in an extended sense of 'disguise', as in the characters not fully knowing themselves, being in a sense 'disguised' to themselves and to others and needing to move towards a state of self-knowledge in which they come to know who they really are and what they really want. Perhaps because it is what Altman calls a 'fairy tale musical', its narrative premises and world overtly fantastical, *The Pirate* incorporates both the literal and less literal modes of disguise and assumed or asserted identity, and it threads these through an unusually extreme drama of mutual re-education.

These motifs can also involve a play on our knowledge of the star's persona and talents. Part of the re-education undergone by Don Lockwood in *Singin' in the Rain* can be thought of in terms of Don Lockwood needing to become Gene Kelly—the refined and dignified persona taken on by Lockwood as the silent film star needing to give way to a celebration of his suppressed identity as a song and dance man. He needs to be recognized by himself and by the world of the film as a musical star whose persona is

'ordinary' rather than refined. Part of the pleasure of the film is in watching the gradual process by which the energy of vaudeville breaks through and takes over from the artifice and deception which it is part of the film's conceit to identify at the outset with Hollywood. In *The Pirate* Serafin/Kelly is already a performer when we first meet him but Manuela/Garland has to become one. In an important sense she must achieve a voice; or perhaps more accurately, as a central part of her re-education she must accept her singing voice as an authentic part of herself.

When Manuela arrives in the port with Aunt Inez she dashes off on her own to see the sea. Minnelli extends the motif of Serafin's uncanny connection to Manuela by managing their first meeting around two further moments at which Serafin materializes almost magically in the shot, the first with a cunning piece of staging when he is revealed behind Manuela after she pauses in mid frame and then rushes forward towards the harbour, and the second when she suddenly becomes aware of his presence alongside her, just out of frame, as she rhapsodizes over her first view of the ocean. With this woman, unlike the anonymous hordes in 'Niña', Serafin seems immediately stricken. Although he circles her at the harbour wall in an overtly predatory manner and goes into a hyperbolic celebration of her beauty, Manuela isn't greeted as just another 'girl'—almost his first question when he addresses her is 'what is your name?'.

At this point we still haven't heard Garland sing. 'Mac the Black', her first number, and 'Niña' are structurally the parallel numbers for female and male leads that feature in the opening movements of many musicals. Here they are also paralleled by defining in music the characters' initial fantasies of themselves in relation to the opposite sex and by linking Manuela and Serafin as charismatic performers. But the number's place in the narrative means that Manuela, under hypnosis, is not conscious that she is performing. We have the pleasure of hearing Garland sing for the first time in the film but Manuela is not aware that she has found her voice.

The plot has Manuela hearing the show and clandestinely creeping out to join the crowd. Serafin spots her and, to the dismay of his colleagues who are highly suspicious of his attempts at mesmerism, plans to hypnotize her as part of the act. His intentions, it becomes clear, are to persuade Manuela to declare her love for him. Manuela proves a highly susceptible subject for hypnosis but to Serafin's dismay declares that the object of her passion is Macoco. She then goes into a song and dance that utterly marginalizes Serafin and becomes more and more exuberant, gradually taking over the performance space and drawing many of the men in the audience into the frenzy of the dance.

The number celebrates Macoco and is therefore consistent with Manuela's story book dreams, but the nature of her performance is anything but submissive. Indeed, it is increasingly physical, active and controlling, with Manuela dominating the space as well as the men in the audience who become over-excited by her extraordinary display of sexual energy. Her performance suggests that the last thing Manuela wants is to be submissive to any man; it is as though her real fantasy is not to be carried off by a pirate

but to become one—to exercise the freedom and power that she can only consciously imagine as the preserve of the male buccaneer. Hypnosis leaves in place Macoco as the desired object but frees her body to express physically the energy latent in dream. For the time being that energy remains focused on the fantasy pirate but the film is beginning to define theatre as the only available social space in which Manuela can be fully active and expressive. In the process of re-education she will need to abandon the dream of the pirate and consciously embrace performance and all it comes to mean.

The next movements of the film dramatize the processes of re-education that take Manuela and Serafin to their final duo as clowns. They also turn on variations of the disguise motif. Back in the village, where Manuela has retreated from the horror of finding out about her public performance, Serafin once more erupts into her life⁸, insisting that she is in love with him. Discovered by Don Pedro in Manuela's room, Serafin recognizes him as Macoco, threatens to expose his real identity and then pretends to be Macoco himself in order to take advantage of Manuela's infatuation with the pirate.

Manuela is bewildered, as well she might be. The actor she has spurned but secretly fancies has turned out to be the object of her fantasy. She is so shaken that she swoons at Don Pedro's feet. The film has now put in place for the spectator its play on fantasy and embodiment. The image of Macoco central to Manuela's picture book and her dream of being carried off to a world of adventure founders for us on the only too solid flesh of Don Pedro, the real Macoco, but is simultaneously realized for Manuela in the body of the actor, Serafin, adopting (as we know but Manuela does not) the role of the pirate. Manuela's fantasy is deconstructed for the spectator almost at the moment that it achieves material shape for her. The image of Macoco then reaches its apotheosis in the pirate ballet.

Ballets are almost structural constants of Gene Kelly's MGM musicals, offering a space, sometimes minimally tied into the narrative, for Kelly to display his athletic dance skills in ways that cannot normally be accommodated by the restrictions of the narrative. In the familiar manner of such numbers, the pirate ballet marks a stylistic break within the movie in its extended use of theatre-ballet based choreography and the abstraction and stylization of décor and action. But it is also more firmly rooted in the surrounding narrative than many MGM ballets by being overtly presented as Manuela's delirious fantasy of Serafin as Macoco.

It is framed by Manuela watching from her window as Serafin overpowers soldiers in the square below and goes into a dance of triumph and display. In a wonderfully absurd prelude to the ballet he whirls around a donkey that sits incongruously on its haunches before the film dissolves from Manuela's face to the ballet itself. The number is another version of 'Mack the Black', this time for orchestra only, and gives vivid visual expression to Manuela's earlier lyrics. Serafin's own self-conscious performance of masculinity with Manuela as its spectator becomes Manuela's imagining of Macoco's awesome power. The ballet must be the most outrageously phallic sequence in Hollywood

cinema. Serafin begins by dancing around a cowering woman, the direct visual replacement for the donkey in the number's narrative frame, slicing off the protruding folds of her headgear which precisely parallel the donkey's ears. The number develops into a condensed extravaganza of violent pirate imagery. Set at night, initially against silhouettes of burning buildings and later with huge shadows looming over the action, the predominant colouring of lighting and backgrounds deep red, the sequence is punctuated by multiple explosions, leaping flames and gun shots. Serafin sees off lines of soldiers; he and his men career across the stage, brandishing swords; he rescues and then discards a woman; with a cry of 'Macoco!', he is hoisted to the top of a huge mast from which he hurls flaming torches to the ground, before sliding down the rigging again. The women we see are cowed or fainting; there is fighting and treasure and Serafin wields cutlass and pistols with piratical skill and abandon. It is both exhilarating and comic. The enormous energy of the dancing, music and spectacle dramatizes the intensity with which Manuela imbues her vision of Macoco now that there is a body to give it flesh. Simultaneously, through the scale of the ballet's rhetoric the film both delights in and satirizes the absurdity of Manuela's fantasy of phallic omnipotence.⁹

After the ballet, Serafin calls for Manuela to be brought to him and threatens to destroy the village if she is not delivered. Manuela feigns reluctance but agrees and in the meantime Don Pedro rides to the capital for help. The three major characters are all now consciously playing roles and are entangled in levels of pretence to achieve their incompatible desires. Manuela for the first time knowingly adopts a role in public and takes a further step towards the world of performance. Serafin embraces the part of Macoco in the hope that somehow it will help him win Manuela. Don Pedro desperately clings to his disguise as the community's respectable mayor. At the heart of the role play for all the characters remains the vision of Macoco which has now been revealed to us as no more than an image, sustainable only in fantasy and able to be given substance only by performance. The rest of the film is about the exposure of disguise, the definitive deconstruction of the pirate fantasy and the contemplation of what remains when the dream has collapsed.

Manuela's rendition of 'Mack the Black', under hypnosis, enabled her to exercise power and freedom of expression that is impossible in her social life. With the appearance of Serafin-as-Macoco she embraces role play in order to be taken to the pirate but the role she plays is that of the sacrificial victim, essentially passive in the face of Macoco's commands. If anything, the embodiment of her fantasy by Serafin intensifies her submissiveness. However, she remains deceived by Serafin's impersonation for only a brief time. When one of his men unwittingly gives the game away her response is anything but passive. Serafin enters, hoping to tell Manuela the truth, but to his dismay she worships extravagantly at the feet of Macoco, now circling him as Serafin had circled her at the harbour wall and scornfully dismissing the second rate actor that he, the great pirate, has pretended to be. After inflicting severe damage to his

actor's ego, her revenge for his deception becomes more physical. As Serafin enters the next room, where Manuela awaits him, she brains him with an ornate bust and then chases him around the room, hurling almost every moveable object in the set at him until he collapses apparently unconscious when a large framed painting crashes down onto his head.

Part of the pleasure of this sequence comes from the role reversal which sees Manuela physically dominating the scene and Serafin retreating under her hail of missiles. It is not a musical number but the nature of the action and the choreography of performers, props and setting give it something of the force of one. As in 'Mack the Black' Manuela dominates the space though an explosion of repressed energy given sudden physical release. Manuela's manic celebration of Macoco in 'Mack the Black' marginalized Serafin and punctured his over-inflated ego, but here the narcissism and the sexual arrogance which have sustained his performance as Macoco are demolished. Manuela's anger is fuelled by Serafin's deception but this is also the scene in which her dream of the pirate begins to give way to more authentic desire as well as more direct self expression. Her resentment is expressed and dissipated and for both characters disguise begins to be discarded as they move towards the free acknowledgement of each other.

Yet the process has further stages to run. The scene also includes the first of the film's two love songs, both of which are sung by Manuela to Serafin, one in private, one in public. Here the intensity of Garland's performance of 'You can do no wrong' is in startling contrast to the physical comedy of the previous action. The cloying sentiments of the lyrics ('I shall worship you my life long, for you can do no wrong . . .') are difficult to adjust to after the liberating exuberance of her revenge on Serafin that went some way to reversing the ballet's gender roles. Emotionally too, it is hard to accept Manuela's apparent reversion to orthodox femininity, with her rapt projection of romantic idealization onto the prostrate Serafin. She also seems to revert here to the mode of fantasy that characterized her Macoco phase: a different object but similarly extravagant sentiments.

What this suggests is that the abruptness of this tonal juxtaposition may well be the point. Although Manuela and Serafin are removing their disguises and moving towards a free mutual acceptance, the process of re-education isn't yet over. In the film's play with gender roles and versions of the couple, extreme expressions of romantic love are perhaps to be seen as no less dubious than the other, more obviously absurd, forms of fantasy. Far from being free to embrace her love with authentic feeling, the rapture of Garland's singing in this context shows Manuela as still held in a version of heterosexual romance that just won't do. This is self-indulgent, one-sided rhapsodizing with Serafin a wholly passive recipient of Manuela's worship.

The pairing of 'You can do no wrong' with 'Love of My Life' as the narrative reaches its climax makes this more overt. Here Manuela sings her love for Serafin/Macoco (she knows he isn't the pirate but the public don't) as the climax of another performance (this time in public) of Macoco worship, intended now to provoke Don Pedro into revealing

his true identity as the pirate. Again the tempo of the song is slow, its rhythms encouraging the exaggerated intensity of feeling in Garland's performance. And again the song involves the woman pouring out her feelings to the largely passive man; she adores him while he is not required to reciprocate in kind—an apparent confirmation of the familiar emotional economy of romantic love. All that is required of him is to move with her, until, as they finally sink to the floor, he kisses her in response to the song's invitation, and their kiss is interrupted by Don Pedro's cry of 'Macoco!'.

But here the number, as well as what precedes it, is a conscious and knowing performance on Manuela's part, a role taken on to achieve specific effects in her attempt to save Serafin from hanging. Crucially, Manuela expresses her love for Serafin not by singing him a love song (the real audience for the song is Don Pedro) but by taking action to save his life, which she does by role-playing and singing in public for the first time with a full awareness of what she is doing. The song is a performance of romantic desire, on a stage, with both performers playing their allotted roles, Serafin taking his cue from Manuela.

Between these two numbers there are the final twists of the plot. The Viceroy appears with Don Pedro, arrests Serafin and orders his execution. In the village square, Manuela matches the engagement ring given her by Don Pedro with other jewelry in Macoco's treasure chest and Don Pedro's true identity dawns on her. With the gallows looming, Serafin persuades the governor to allow him one last performance. Serafin intends the climax to be his attempt to hypnotize Don Pedro, before Aunt Inez smashes the magic mirror and Manuela comes to the rescue. But the performance begins with the first version of 'Be a Clown', the number that adds the final elements necessary to set up the ending.

This is the most exuberant and upbeat number in the film so far. It is in part another opportunity for Kelly to exhibit his dancing skills, this time in a speciality acrobatic dance number which he performs with the Nicholas Brothers. Like the other Kelly dance numbers, 'Niña' and the ballet, this is very much a male dominated affair. The first two numbers, however, involve outrageous performances of male sexual arrogance and phallic power, while 'Be a Clown' much more straightforwardly celebrates the transformative energy of popular entertainment, and more specifically of clowning.

Rick Altman argues that Gene Kelly's most characteristic numbers are not devoted to making love but to showing off: 'Always confident of his own abilities, Kelly seems at his best when he is clowning'¹⁰. Altman links this to the child-like qualities in Kelly's persona and the problem this sets his films of how his characters can achieve 'the impossible feat of becoming a man without ceasing to be a child . . .'¹¹ 'Be a Clown' seems almost the literal embodiment of these ideas, with the skill and sophistication of the mature dancer channeled into the child-like exuberance of clowning and overtly sexual display giving way to the joyful ingenuity of dance as fun. Here the sexual pretensions that characterize Serafin's earlier persona and the previous dance numbers

are stripped away as the penultimate phase of his re-education. Like the image of Macoco, Serafin's 'Niña' persona was a fantasy predicated on male sexual power and gender inequality, and it must be abandoned before the couple can be definitively established.

In a parallel way, the earlier dance numbers depended massively on the signification of sexual difference. Here, on the other hand, the number involves boys playing clowns in a way that seems to suggest an almost pre-sexual state. The 'side by side' synchronization of parts of the number, together with the intricately interwoven movements of their bodies in other parts create the most powerful dramatization in the film of mutuality and interdependence. There is of course a new issue of difference here, introduced into the film by the appearance of the Nicholas Brothers, a development that would have been highly significant for at least some American audiences in the 1940s¹². At one level the number clearly celebrates the amazing dancing skills of the Nicholas Brothers. At another it is a very unusual example of integrated dance in a Hollywood musical of the studio period. This is an aspect of an important history that can't be pursued here. For the purposes of this article, though, the ethnic difference within same-sex performance also acts as a significant relay in the shifting terms of the film's play with gender and heterosexual romance. 'Be a Clown' leaves behind sexual difference for a celebration of pleasurable interdependence between men (or men as boys). It creates an image of mutuality that adds a crucial value to the mix for the perfect couple. Yet within the mutuality difference remains and is not (cannot be) submerged or

ignored. The number celebrates unity and difference simultaneously—it images a utopian state in which difference is fundamental and yet not the source of conflict.

So how can sexual difference be re-introduced and integrated into the film's final numbers? Equally, how can Manuela's oscillations of passive femininity and highly active self-expression be reconciled? The first of three stages is 'Love of My Life', where feminine romantic obsession is presented as performance. After this number Don Pedro/Macoco is overpowered by the combined actions of the theatrical troupe, the complications of disguise have been fully cast off or exposed, Serafin and Manuela embrace and the couple is finally established in full public view. The final stage is to reprise 'Be a Clown' but replace the Nicholas Brothers with Manuela/Judy Garland.

But the film has to negotiate its way to this finale. Crucially, Manuela has yet to be released from the power of her aunt and the stifling society of her village so that she can fully enter Serafin's world. Hollywood romantic comedy tends towards resolutions that focus largely or entirely on the couple rather than the wider world of the film and in this respect Minnelli and his collaborators follow convention. However, their solution to the remaining narrative problem is bold and telling. The formal break before this coda both acknowledges the way in which potential narrative difficulties (such as Manuela leaving home to become an actor) have been cut through, and avoids having to negotiate them. No social complications are to intrude on the final image of the couple. Manuela's dream of freedom from the constraints of her home village is finally managed



Walter Slezak/Macoco and
Aunt Inez/Gladys Cooper.



The happy ending: the 'be a clown' number.

by the film in the manner of the escape of the comic book hero: 'With one bound she was free'. Though we are not invited to linger on the implications of the narrative break into the coda, one of its implicit effects is to leave the island's society intact—rather than, for instance, dissolving discord into a final benign celebration of harmony and good will. The social world has not been transformed here. One further fascinating consequence is that marriage, the future that the resolution of romantic comedy invariably promises, simply seems irrelevant to the final sequence of *The Pirate*. Marriage in the film remains identified with the economic transactions of Manuela's village rather than the future of Manuela and Serafin.

This is to imply that the end of the film is deliberately asocial, an image of togetherness removed even from the fantastical social world of the rest of the film. We can read this as a tacit way of acknowledging the utopian nature of what is being imagined here—an escape from but not a solution to the tensions of the film's world. Even so, the question remains of how to image in performance the now achieved equality of the couple without reverting to the male/female imbalances of earlier phases of the movie.

In the article quoted earlier, Richard Dyer shows how

different versions of the heterosexual couple are negotiated in dance numbers. He defines two prevalent versions of heterosexuality and its attractions within our culture. One ('the Jane Austen model') involves the idea of 'complementarity within equality . . . the blending of opposites, the balance, say of his pride against her prejudice, both sides making up the deficiencies of the other . . .'. Here, the implication is of men and women being incomplete in themselves but capable of being 'rapturously fused in an equal, loving, relationship'. In the second ('the Barbara Cartland model'), 'the spice is inequality as well as difference; the intoxications are having power over, surrendering to a greater power, manipulating the powerful to your own ends, ceding power before the charms of the less powerful'. In this version there is no question of these roles being reversed between men and women—there is a direct 'correlation between gender and power, men relishing having power, women luxuriating in surrender'. For Dyer these are the most pervasive images of the couple but he outlines 'a third, much less common model of the appeal of heterosexuality', which suggests that qualities of sameness and identity, of finding what you have in common, might also be delightful¹³.

The Pirate has much of its fun at the expense of 'the Cartland model', and is unusually explicit about the fantasies and the artifice that sustain the pleasures of power and surrender. By the end Manuela's dream that subjection to the phallic power of the pirate is a route to her liberation and Serafin's self-important posturing, both in his 'Niña' persona and as Macoco, have equally been exposed and collapsed. Even the more conventional image of the woman's romantic rapture over her love becomes part of the fabric of fantasy to be discarded. But it does not substitute for 'Cartland' 'the Austen model' of complementarity within equality. The embrace of Manuela and Serafin, facing into the camera, after the unmasking and capture of Macoco, seems to take us to the threshold of embracing this model—partners in performance and in love, revelling in their interplay, but drawing on complementary qualities which are inherent in their roles as man and woman. The film offers us this possibility but then draws back—or rather breaks dramatically into the disorienting close up of Serafin. If neither Cartland nor Austen will do, what kind of couple can we be left with?

The substitution of Garland for the Nicholas brothers in the second rendition of 'Be a Clown' necessitates a change in dancing style. But the strong sense of mutuality and interdependence remains in the choreography, while the sense of equality between the performers—with the film's two stars now singing and dancing together—is considerably increased. At the same time, some of the action involves the clowns playing tricks on each other—Serafin attempting to manipulate Manuela so that she will be hit over the head by the huge Indian club wielded from the wings, a game in which Manuela first manages to outwit Serafin but then is clubbed herself. Integral to the pleasures of togetherness in physically exuberant performance is the comic enactment of rivalry, as though performing together can acknowledge tensions and rivalries but collapse them into fun.

Having fun together is a key value in defining the couple in screwball comedy, where the fun that is dramatized is not overtly sexual but signals the compatibility of the couple in that department among others. This motif is also central to *The Pirate* but considerably complicated by the comic demolition of fantasy that occupies such a major part of the film's energy. Only the energy and emotional commitment that sustained the fantasies remain, now channeled into and finding expression in performance.

With the collapse of disguise and dream, then, the film seems to reach towards something rather like Dyer's third possibility. Yet it refuses the pretence that such an image of a man and a woman, delighting in 'what they have in common', can simply be summoned up. Instead it transforms them in a way that both embraces the positive qualities of Dyer's third way and seems to imply a rueful commentary on the attempt to create a couple to embody them. A pair of clowns make for an unusual romantic couple, one that allows for delight in 'sameness and identity' through sharing the freedom, exuberance and physical expressiveness of song and dance, but at the cost of excluding the attributes we conventionally associate with love and desire in the heterosexual couple. An image of equality, the condition that

underpins the pleasure of shared identity for the couple, is achieved but only by reducing the signifiers of gender difference and sexual attraction to a minimum, as though to let these in would inevitably unleash the old inequalities.¹⁴ It is as if, faced with the problem of how to embody equality in romance after the wonderful elaboration of the film so far, Minnelli and his collaborators throw up their hands in comic exasperation and say, 'OK, here it is'. At the end, picking themselves up after a hail of Indian clubs has floored them, Manuela and Serafin sing the final lines of the number, 'Be a clown, be a clown, be a clown'; they look at each other in gleeful complicity, begin to giggle and, as the camera tracks in, they embrace while bursting into uproarious laughter.

I want to thank the members of 'The Sewing Circle', the informal film analysis seminar in the Department of Film, Theatre & Television at the University of Reading, for a stimulating discussion of *The Pirate*.

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- 1 Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987, page 186.
- 2 Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, London: British Film Institute, 1982, Page 40.
- 3 Richard Dyer " 'I seem to find the happiness I seek': Heterosexuality and Dance in the Musical", in *Dance, Gender and Culture*, ed. Helen Thomas, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993, Page 53.
- 4 *Easter Parade* was intended as the next vehicle for Garland and Kelly, following *The Pirate*, but Astaire stepped in when Kelly broke his arm.
- 5 'Vicente Minnelli', *Brighton Film Review*, No 15, December 1969 and No 18, March 1970. Reprinted in Rick Altman (ed) *Genre: The Musical*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, 8—27.
- 6 Among many examples, see, for instance, *The Awful Truth*, *Holiday*, *Bringing up Baby*, *Singin' in the Rain*.
- 7 For one of the most profound explorations of these themes see Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 1981.
- 8 In fact, as though finally to confirm that Serafin is summoned up by the power of Manuela's desire, the last of Serafin's sudden appearances comes after Manuela, at home in the village, is told by her unsuspecting aunt, 'You can make anything come true if you wish for it'. Manuela takes out the bedraggled straw hat, ruined when it blew into a puddle during her first encounter with Serafin, and smiles fondly at it. Suddenly, from the street outside, she hears the music that signals the approach of Serafin's troupe.
- 9 Laura Mulvey uses the splendid phrase, 'phallic narcissistic omnipotence' to evoke the state personified by the man's rejection of marriage in the Western. See 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"', inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*, in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1989, Page 33.
- 9 Altman, Rick, *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987, Page 55
- 10 Ibid, 57.
- 11 I have a memory of reading that the number was cut for exhibition in some areas of the South, but I am unable to trace the source. Verification (or not) would be welcome.
- 12 Richard Dyer, op cit Pages 49—50.
- 13 Dyer glumly comments in the conclusion of his article, 'It seems that with heterosexuality in dance, the nearer you get to sex the less sameness and equality can be tolerated'. Page 63.

The Cobweb

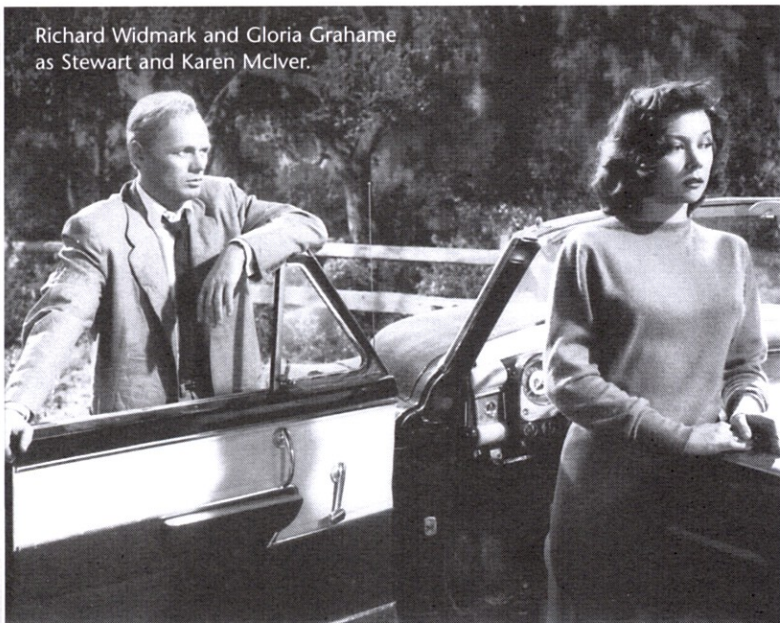
BY STELLA BRUZZI

The Cobweb (1955) is based on William Gibson's novel about a psychiatric clinic (the Castlehouse Clinic for Nervous Disorders) in which the members of staff are almost as troubled as their patients. Its narrative revolves around the decision to replace the library drapes, and three rival sets of drapes emerge as contenders: the first, a plain, functional set ordered by Miss Inch (Lillian Gish), the clinic's accountant; the second a set that are to be made in-house and will use the drawings of one of the patients, Stevie Holte (John Kerr); the last, a more exclusive set ordered by Karen McIver (Gloria Grahame), wife of the clinic's director, in cahoots with Regina Mitchell-Smith, the president of the clinic's Board of Trustees. Onto the question of the drapes hang most if not all of the film's fraught character interrelationships: the psychological fragility of the patients, the crumbling marriage of Karen and Stewart McIver (Richard Widmark), the affair between Stewart and the clinic's new art teacher, Meg Rinehart (Lauren Bacall), the power struggle between McIver and his predecessor,

Douglas Devanal (Charles Boyer) who still heads the clinic, but in name only. The latter part of *The Cobweb* becomes preoccupied with a police-led search for Stevie, who disappears from the clinic upon seeing Karen's drapes hanging in the library. He subsequently turns up outside McIver's house, after the McIvers have, most implausibly, reconciled. This forced happy ending reverses the conclusion of the novel, in which Stewart leaves Karen for Meg. Despite Karen's drapes briefly going up, the library windows remain unadorned.

The Cobweb was not a critical or commercial success and the film is the result of a series of compromises. As its producer John Houseman noted, 'the truth is that, compared with other recent films (he and Minnelli had made the more highly regarded *The Bad and The Beautiful* two years earlier), this was not an entirely happy one—either in its making or in the way it was received'.¹ There were problems over casting—Houseman never agreed with the casting of Boyer as Dev, he had also wanted James Dean for the part of Stevie and, it was rumoured, none of the other main actors were MGM's first choices.² There followed problems over the script—Minnelli brought in Gibson to write some additional dialogue, but he was never entirely satisfied with it. Then there were arguments over editing as Houseman cut thirty minutes from Minnelli's intended two and a half hour completed film; the director was less than happy with these cuts, although later he became reconciled to them.³ Although one reviewer, Lee Rogow in *Saturday Review*, found *The Cobweb* to be 'one of the most rewarding films I have recently seen come out of Hollywood',⁴ press responses were not good and even Houseman thought there was 'something contrived about the plot ... The emotional turmoil aroused by the hanging of a set of new drapes in the main living-room of the institution was never entirely credible nor dramatically viable'.⁵

The central problem with *The Cobweb* is the drapes—Houseman considers the contrivances of the drapes plot to lack credibility, and several contemporary critics unfavourably cite the prominence given to them in the film. However, I have always found *The Cobweb* to work precisely *because* of its prioritisation of the drapes, and in this



Richard Widmark and Gloria Grahame
as Stewart and Karen McIver.

Lauren Bacall, Richard Widmark and John Kerr.





The trouble begins: Karen gives Stevie a lift.

the film is exemplary of one aspect of Minnelli's style—the over-determined importance accorded not just production design but décor in particular. The emphasis on décor and design as generators of meaning is, notwithstanding Hollywood melodrama's pervasive tendency to explain emotional complexity through *mise-en-scène*, peculiar to Minnelli. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith writes in 'Minnelli and Melodrama', Minnelli's melodramas can be likened to conversion hysteria:

It is not just that the characters are often prone to hysteria, but that the film itself somatises its own unaccommodated excess, which this appears displaced or in the wrong place.⁶

In the case of *The Cobweb*, the characters' emotional and psychological troubles are transposed onto the drapes. This makes for a highly unconventional narrative, despite

the formulaic 'The trouble begins' and 'The trouble was over' titles that top and tail the film.⁷

Minnelli's background was in design. Before going into movies he worked as a department store decorator, an assistant to a portrait photographer and a set and costume designer for Radio City Music Hall in New York, finally becoming a Broadway designer-director.⁸ Mark Shivas has commented that Minnelli's 'concern with colour and décor have led people to dismiss him as a dilettante interested in peripheral decoration', going on to defend the director's method when arguing that 'for him the visual and dramatic aspects of a film are inseparable ... The décor springs ideally, from the subject of the film'.⁹ It is precisely this mutuality between style and meaning that is characteristic of Minnelli's *mise-en-scène*. It is not just that Minnelli's 'sophistication belongs to the world of *Vogue*, *Harpers* and *Vanity Fair*' as James Naremore observes, he goes further, as noted by Barry Boys, by 'conceiving the *mise-en-scène* as action'.¹⁰

Stephen Harvey offers a pithy, evocative analysis of *The Cobweb* in which he similarly argues that 'Minnelli of all directors believed that décor was the mirror of the soul'.¹¹ This is, in part, a response to censorship and the impositions of the production code (as Harvey goes on to comment, 'prevailing censorship taboos clamped a straightjacket on the novel's characters',¹² leading to the elimination of one patient's homosexuality as well as the McIvers' marital reconciliation). Of the narrative tribulations surrounding the library drapes, Harvey proves to be one of the few critics of the film to understand how they function as much more than a mere plot device, arguing that the motif 'becomes Minnelli's own form of on-the-spot occupational therapy'.¹³

Minnelli comprehends and, in turn, represents narrative through design and colour; elements such as décor and, to a lesser extent, costume are used to create meaning and not merely to serve or embellish character and action. It is not just the three sets of drapes at the centre of *The Cobweb* that are important in this respect. Elsewhere, there are the curiously domestic drapes that hang in McIver's office as he conducts a therapy session (the only notable one in a film ostensibly 'about' a psychiatric clinic) with Stevie Holte. Stevie ends up on McIver's couch with McIver sitting behind him, framed by his window either side of which hang brown and white patterned drapes, a vase of white flowers next to him. The cosiness of this image complicates the doctor-patient dialogue, which treads clichéd therapeutic ground and is weighed down with platitudes from the vocabulary of psychoanalysis. Stevie, for instance, sardonically inquires if McIver is going to unravel his *Id* and help him resolve his tortured Oedipal relationship with his father. Karen McIver bursts in on this session only to be reprimanded by her husband, her interruption serving to bring to light Stevie's Oedipal fixation on Karen, with whom he has just shared a car ride. McIver concludes the session by assuring Stevie 'I'm not your father ... I'm not going to run out on you'. If one pieces together various important strands of McIver's narrative—his unhappy marriage, his fantasy of somehow sharing a child with Meg Rinehart (later, as they discuss Stevie's designs for the drapes McIver tells Meg they could show Stevie 'we're different—good parents'), his virtual estrangement from his own family home—then the drapes in this therapy scene start to connote, through their overt domestication of the clinical environment, his own sense of loss for all this domestic contentment.

In *The Cobweb*, the drapes are the prime narrative motivator and it is through an understanding of the décor (and specifically the tripartite battle over the library drapes) that psychology and emotions are explained, not *vice versa*. This displacement might seem unhinged, as Harvey suggests when remarking that 'To those who don't share his (Minnelli's) credo, two insistent hours of interior-decoration-as-truth-serum is bound to seem a trifle imbalanced'.¹⁴ A sequence of short scenes about forty minutes into the action is illustrative of this unconventional 'imbalance'. First, Miss Inch's drape material arrives, conflicting directly and immediately with the patients' buzzing anticipation, as they hear that Stevie's are to be used in the library. Next, while at dinner, Stevie, buoyed by this news and instantly

less neurotic, invites a fellow patient Sue (Susan Strasberg) to the cinema 'to celebrate' (Sue, who is agoraphobic, here declines, but later in the film they manage their date). Then there follows a conversation about the drapes between Vicky Inch and Meg Rinehart, which concludes with Vicky exploding at Meg, whom she assumes to be in cahoots with Karen McIver (in fact, Meg knows nothing of the third set of drapes at this stage). The action then cuts to Karen having cocktails with Dev, whose support for her plan for the drapes she is genuinely enlisting. The first shot of this exchange is of Karen's chintz swatch on the table, although it is clear that the conversation has been about the state of Karen's marital troubles, and the conversation ends with Karen confiding 'I don't know what I need'. Lastly, there is the first of two scenes between Meg and Stewart to take place at Meg's flat. Again, the ostensible focus of their discussion is how good the designing of the drapes is for Stevie's self esteem, but the motive for their conversation is actually mutual attraction, the drapes are merely a convenient ruse.

As Nowell-Smith observed, many of Minnelli's melodramas and musicals tend towards a very specific interrelationship between hysteria and excess; repressed emotions 'which cannot be accommodated within the action' are transferred onto the *mise-en-scène*, in much the same way as, in conversion hysteria, a repressed idea returns 'converted into a bodily symptom'.¹⁵ In this sequence of scenes, the 'repressed', as Nowell-Smith envisages it, barely surfaces; instead it becomes understood almost entirely through its symptomatic manifestation (the drapes), so effective is the transference of inner problem onto the contrived, frenetic discussions about drapes. The drapes in *The Cobweb* swiftly become the motif through which psychology, emotions and individual traumas are identified and elucidated. Now I will now turn to each set of drapes in turn.

Miss Inch's drapes

These drapes, though the first to be ordered, are also the first to be rejected and sent back. The precise moment at which Vicky Inch makes the phone call saying she needs to send the drapes back is in itself important, as her decision comes in the wake of a depressing conversation with Dev, whom she still thinks to be more than nominally in charge of the clinic. Dev, once a respected psychiatric figure has degenerated into a lecherous alcoholic and, since his arrival, Stewart McIver has been the clinic's director in all but name. Inch, who disapproves of the decision (made by McIver and the patients' committee) to allow Stevie to design the new drapes, goes in to see Dev in order to harangue him about the situation, and also to question McIver's belief in patient 'self-government'. She also asks Dev why she has never seen McIver's contract (which effectively outlines the transferral of managerial power from Dev to him). The setting for this awkward conversation between two old colleagues is Dev's stale, grey office, an office that, despite its one vibrant but jaundice-coloured chair, is marked with the pallor of resignation and defeat. Inch, a pinched old woman who herself bustles around in crisp, functional grey or beige, is merciless towards Dev, comparing him

unfavourably to a previous inhabitant of his office whose portrait hangs opposite Dev's desk. As she leaves, Vicky, looking round the office, spits out her final insult: 'It's a sad sight ... seeing such a small man in it'. Vicky Inch's frugal green-blue cotton wrap drapes, in their ostentatious drabness, represent Vicky's last attempt to revive the old order that she now realises has effectively ended with Dev's demise. They lack the lustre, extravagance or creativeness of their rivals and in their very functionality proclaim Vicky's efforts to deny the inevitable forces of change being ushered in by McIver. She discards the drapes at the same moment as she discards Dev, acknowledging that her allegiance to him (as to the drapes and to tradition) has been misplaced. With the return of the rolls of cotton wrap, Vicky detects the disintegration of what she stood for, the entrenched conservatism represented by her continued admiration for her father (whose portrait hangs in *her* office) who fought the 'Indians' for the territory on which the clinic stands and her desire to preserve the *status quo*, represented by the studied old-fashionedness of her room and the dark wig she does not want to be seen without. These drapes would be lifeless, functional and cold.

The democratic drapes

The set of muslin drapes conceived of by Meg Rinehart and to be designed by Stevie Holte, are the decorative expression of McIver's belief in his patients' right to self-government and his consummate rejection of the hierarchical structure that predominated under Dev. However, these drapes—necessarily more fantastical than the others and, significantly, never seen completed—are not unambiguously liberating; they also convey (and to a large extent have caused) the chaos that besets the clinic for the majority of the film. Such ambivalence is signalled by the design itself: a series of caricatured sketches depicting the clinic and those who inhabit it. Although one could tentatively make the observation that, in the mid-1950s when the film was made, there was a certain penchant for such panelled, non-uniform interior fabrics, authenticity does not seem to be the point here. Instead, the eclectic, fragmentary design connotes two things: that designing and making the drapes can be creatively therapeutic and, conversely, that by releasing the repressed forces channelled into making them, that that same creativity can destabilise the working environment of the clinic. Although McIver's drive towards democratisation and 'self-government' is treated positively, the fight over the drapes and the new freedoms experienced by the patients also leads to disruption and chaos, exemplified by Stevie's disappearance at the end of the film and the raucous wake the patients hold in his honour. Early on, the patients were more sedate and obedient; the catalyst for their growing vociferousness is the idea for the democratically designed drapes.

The making of these drapes (an idiosyncratic form of occupational therapy) signals the demotion of traditional psychotherapy—a demise that arguably had already been presaged by *The Cobweb's* very first sequence, in which Karen McIver offers Stevie a lift to the clinic. In this scene, Karen (perceived, quite wrongly, by the majority of critics to

be little more than a vacuous caricature, superficial and sexually frustrated) gets a lot further with Stevie than her husband does subsequently in his conventional therapy session. Karen and Stevie form a subversive bond, their ostensibly inconsequential chat about flowers, colour and the Fauves painters serving to lay out the reasons for the importance of forward thinking and the democratic drapes. Upon entering her car, Stevie spies the vast bunch of red gladioli on the back seat and asks Karen if they are for a funeral. He leans back, breaks off one flower tip and muses about the artist Derain who, on his deathbed, said 'some red, show me some red. Before dying I want to see some red and some green'. Derain died in the sterile white environs of a room in a clinic. Although the prevailing tones of Stevie's residence are not sterile white, the parallel with Derain is unmistakable: the need for colour represents the need for art and outlets for creativity over and above medicine and talking through one's problems. Karen—who is intuitive where her husband is cerebral—understands this. As they reach the clinic and Stevie is about to get out, the two share a final thought; as Stevie quips 'You can't tell the patients from the doctors', Karen jokes 'Oh I can—the patients get better'. McIver envisages that he is consigning to history the outmoded hierarchical order by introducing the ethos of self-government, thereby officially blurring the distinction between doctor and patient. In fact, McIver, who fails to mask his residual conservatism under his smooth politically correct exterior, is prepared for nothing of the sort.

These drapes are the ultimate expression of the values set out in the exchange between Karen and Stevie: they are vibrantly colourful, energetic, unconventional and critical of the establishment. They would also, had we ever seen them in their entirety, make a chaotic, jarring set of curtains. Of the drawings Stevie produces, one prominently displayed image is of the exterior of the clinic (as if an expressive children's illustration, it shows the clinic as a make-believe palace), another is a cartoon sketch of McIver. This latter study is particularly significant in the light of Stevie's conversation with Karen for, in this intense blue picture, which depicts the doctor in the foreground and Sue behind him, it is the therapist—left floating amidst a blank background and so detached from the familiar reality of his surroundings—who is under scrutiny. This sketch of McIver, picturing him as it does staring directly out at us, further denotes the role of the drapes as a means of countering the patients' instinctive introspection. Stevie at one point remarks to Meg Rinehart that he rarely thinks of other people (except in relation to himself, hence his interest in Karen); being approached to design the drapes helps suppress this solipsistic tendency and draws all the patients out of themselves. The intensity of McIver's direct outward gaze negates the inherent introspective function of drapes to shut things out, to shield one from the outside world. Further, these drapes prove the catalyst for renewed social interaction between the patients.

This is why the effect, half way through *The Cobweb*, of the news that Dev (in his last desperate pretence that he still wields some power) has intervened in the drapes issue and instructed the board of trustees to use Karen's rather

than the patients' designs, has such a temporarily catastrophic effect. Upon hearing this news, Stevie bursts into the art room and pulls down his drawings. Caught between Meg and McIver (the coupling in relation to Stevie is significant as earlier McIver had, with pride, said to Meg that they could function as 'good parents' to Stevie by showing him 'we're different'), Stevie is persuaded to talk to McIver, who at the end of their impromptu session, is seen dictating a counter memo to Dev's, reinstating the patients' drapes. The dialogue between McIver and Stevie happens against another grey backdrop: the walls are a dull grey and off-white, there are a couple of touches of turgid brown; against this McIver and Stevie sit, the former dressed (as always) in black, grey and white and the latter in grey top and pale slacks. If décor can convey anything, the fact that McIver and Stevie are literally in danger of melting into the background re-articulates the notion that the colourful, anti-conformist drapes would liberate the individual.

Nowhere is the psychological effect of Stevie's drapes more evident than in a scene that transpires not long after they have been reinstated. One evening, McIver, who is on his way home, passes the clinic's art workshop and hears laughter. The temptation for Stewart is Meg, with whom, unhappy in his marriage to Karen, he is rapidly falling in love. He joins what turns out to be a screen-printing party; Meg is there, alongside a colleague preparing screen-prints for the drapes and his heavily pregnant wife. Stewart (like Cary in the comparable party scene at Mick and Alita's in *All that Heaven Allows*) looks, if not entirely out of place, then out of tune in his formal monochrome clothes and tie. Apart from Stewart who spends most of the scene sitting down and only half involved, the characters move animatedly around the room, their gestures are big, their voices loud and expressive; they drink wine and eat spaghetti—informal Italian food signifying here (as it always does) a love of life and the ability to have fun.

The drapes they are making up, however, are a utopian fantasy: a great idea, but more important as an idea than as a tangible reality. Sweeping across the huge expanse of tall bay window they are supposedly to adorn, far from liberating the patients' collective psyche, they would reflect back at the patients their latent insanity. It is arguably for this reason that Stevie—whose escape from the clinic and thoughts of suicide are prompted by finding Karen's drapes up in the library—is finally calmed at the end of *The Cobweb* not by being reunited with his own drapes but by finding himself swaddled in Karen's. Clearly, the film's saccharine ending was the result of Production Code restrictions. Although Minnelli himself refers to this only in relation to the need to impose the 'dishonest' reconciliation between Stewart and Karen McIver,¹⁶ he also makes this 'dishonest' ending make sense of the therapeutic power of the drapes.

Karen's drapes

Whilst the aesthetically chaotic drapes Stevie has designed would have positive therapeutic value, Karen's formal chintz drapes are strikingly more homogenous in their design. Made up using 'Chippendale Rose on Antique Satin', a stodgy but glamorous black floral design on a back-



Doctor and patient.

ground of ivory, Karen's drapes are the most plausible for interior design purposes—but of course, their plausibility is far less significant than what they represent. As I have said, critics have been unkind to Karen. Rogow comments that, as Karen, Gloria Grahame 'projects all the spite and soul-smallness of the wife without suggesting her needs and fears', and Gavin Lambert can find in her character no more than narcissism and sexual discontent.¹⁷ Grahame (whose role was reputedly going at first to be played by Lana Turner)¹⁸ is held responsible in part for her character's superficiality, Houseman telling an amusing anecdote that explains her mannered performance. He recounts how Grahame, who had starred in and won an Oscar for Houseman and Minnelli's *The Bad and the Beautiful*, arrived on the first day of shooting on *The Cobweb* having had a stitch in her upper lip to 'give her the sexy, bee-stung look she wanted'. Houseman maintained that this 'latest spasm of surgical masochism ... impeded her speech and gave her an unpleasantly frozen expression'.¹⁹ I am rather fond of Karen, and I think Grahame's hysterical performance, precipitously close as it is to insanity, is a rich embellishment.

Karen's problem is that her husband Stewart no longer loves her or finds her attractive (in this, her emotional crisis is on a par with those of many of the patients). She uses the showy drapes she has selected as the ineffectual means of trying to communicate with Stewart—a pointless gesture, as both Stewart's attitude to his wife and his disinterest in design and clothes demonstrate that he is not the person to understand such a displaced dialogue.

As with both Vicky Inch's and Stevie Holte's drapes, Karen McIver's are an extension of herself. Two things tell us this early on: her predilection for ostentatious flowers and the compatibility of her own sartorial style with the fabric's chintzy sheen. These two factors converge during the first sequence in the McIvers' miserable home. Upstairs in the marital bedroom Karen bemoans the fact that her husband devotes more time to his patients than he does to his family, the lack of sexual intent being highlighted ironically through the studious disregard for the potential for sex as Stewart sits on sensuous, silken dusty pink bedspread changing his shirt while Karen sits behind him. Into this loaded exchange, Karen introduces the swatch of chintz, throwing it towards Stewart so it comes to rest on his thigh, a symbol, I've always thought, for where Karen's hand would like to be. As he becomes preoccupied with talking about the effect Karen had on Stevie when they met earlier in the day (another sexual problem between them), Karen, who tries and fails several times in the film to talk to her husband about the drapes, gives up in her attempt to introduce the subject here. Stewart goes downstairs and joins their son who is playing chess in the dining room, a room stiflingly adorned with so many displays of cut flowers that it does indeed resemble the funeral parlour Stevie joked the gladioli were for when riding with Karen at the beginning of the film. The gladioli themselves are in a vase at the bottom of the stairs. Karen, who has also been changing clothes, comes down in an ivory evening gown and wrap, whose texture and shade of satin recall the chintz swatch. After a lame attempt by Stewart at reconciliation—the funeral gladioli lurking behind them—Karen flounces out of the door, looking as elegant and sensuous as the 'Chippendale Rose', her silken dress skimming her curves.

Karen's close identification with her drapes (the one time we see her in bed, she is under ivory satin sheets, similar to her dress and thence to the chintz) and the urgency with which she enlists the help of Regina and, ill-advisedly, the lecherous Dev to help her make them up, conveys the extent of her transference of her own emotional needs onto this interior design project. This is no doubt why critics perceived Karen to be superficial, as the manufacturing of the drapes take immediate priority over everything else, including her maternal responsibilities towards her children who are neglected by both parents throughout. To only see Karen's superficiality, however, is to misunderstand her intention, which is, from beginning to end, to salvage her marriage. This is expressed poignantly during one of their many telephone conversations as Karen says to Stewart that she wants to 'talk about us'. For this, Karen, leaning on the back of the family's grey sofa, looks uncharacteristically subdued in simple black daywear (in fact, as her reconciliation

with Stewart draws nearer, Karen's costumes increasingly signal her conformity). Suddenly, Karen looks like Stewart. Maybe the intention behind this shift is to show that the McIvers are compatible after all and to plant the seed for their eventual reconciliation, although Karen surrounded by a grey interior also likens her to the patients she thinks Stewart cares too much about. Her demureness strikes a false note and because of this, Karen's appearance here signals defeat (as a wife and a sexual being), a quality underlined only a couple of scenes later when she, in the same outfit, goes into her husband's study and discovers, by looking through the staff numbers' list, that Stewart is spending the evening with Meg Rinehart. (Once more, the distance between husband and wife is suggested by Karen having to use the phone to reach Stewart, here calling Meg's home number).

It is at this moment that Karen, in a final lunging bid to be noticed by Stewart, drags the chintz drapes out of her closet at home in order to put them up, late one evening, in the clinic's library. The 'Chippendale Rose' drapes have not only become her alter ego but also her wifely burden, a part of herself that she represses (her drapes spend most of their time secreted in a closet) and whose suppression weighs her down. Our attention is drawn to the weight of the drapes on two occasions—when they are delivered and Karen drags them into her hall closet (this should be a moment of triumph, as the scene follows on from Dev dictating his letter telling the Board that Karen's should be the drapes that are used, but Karen hides them away because she has realised that they are not going to help her get Stewart back) and when they are dragged back out of the closet just after Karen has discovered Stewart is with Meg. As her hidden alter ego they are now brought into the open, pulled angrily, purposefully from closet to car, before coming to rest in the library, where Karen unceremoniously rips down the old drapes and defiantly hangs up her own. As Karen adorns the expanse of window with an expanse of decorative chintz, she proclaims both her own presence (excessive, even crass, display often connotes in cinema a woman's attempt to stamp her personality on a scene that otherwise threatens to engulf her) and the total displacement onto the drapes of her feelings of need, loss and desperation. As previously noted, upon seeing the drapes, Stevie vanishes; then Stewart—who was the last to understand the full complexity of the drapes situation—finds that the chintz drapes are up and promptly pulls them down. Stewart's sexual rejection of Karen here is unmistakable. The last portion of *The Cobweb* is taken up by the search for Stevie, during which time the chintz drapes make their mournful way back to the McIvers' house. As Stewart and Karen get back together, they return home to find Stevie, bedraggled and weak, outside their door. Stevie tells them 'I came back' (which one could gloss as 'I've come home') and they help him inside. Karen makes Stevie lie down on the sofa—which is covered with the rejected chintz drapes, but at this point he can only see the lining—and tries to feed him some warm milk; he seems to be sleeping so Karen swaddles him in the drapes, this time with the pattern clearly visible. As Stevie stirs, he spies the pattern that had previ-

ously caused him such trauma and quips 'I seem to keep running into these things'. The film's final title 'The trouble was over ...' comes up over the chintz. What is the tone of this ending? Of course one cannot help but see it as tacked on and entirely incapable of offering a plausible conclusion to the discontent that precedes it. However, it is neatly in keeping with the film's attention to the details of *mise-en-scène* that Stevie's cure is effected by drapes and not by analysis.

Stewart McIver

By means of a conclusion I want finally to turn to the character of Stewart McIver, who is implicated in the drapes shenanigans but who, until the drapes battle is in full flow, has failed to understand what is going on with them. As Franco Moretti discerned,²⁰ there is a moment in the melodramatic narrative when the audience or reader is moved to cry; this moment is when a character, who hitherto has remained crucially ignorant about something that both audience and other characters know, reaches that same point of knowledge but only when it is too late. If 'Agitation is a "moving" device when it comes too late',²¹ then it logically follows that, if it comes just in time, it has the opposite effect—of resolving a potentially tragic situation through reconciliation rather than through tears. *The Cobweb* is resolved through Stewart's belated involvement in the drapes situation. Until the moment when he comes face to face with Karen's swathes of chintz and angrily yanks them down off their rails, he has remained curiously detached from the business of ordering, designing and fighting over the drapes. Stewart's detachment from the complexities surrounding the drapes proves to be symptomatic of his lack of understanding about emotions and femininity, the two forces that dictate *The Cobweb's* plot machinations, and this ignorance finds a significant parallel in his clumsiness when it comes to romantic and familial relations. It is only after he has become immersed in the drapes problem that Stewart starts to disentangle and make amends for the multitude of things he has hitherto got wrong: he decides not to leave Karen for Meg, he admits, at the board meeting, his responsibility for Stevie's disappearance and he finally acknowledges to his son (his daughter has by this point, to all intents and purposes, vanished from the film) that for a doctor 'sometimes it's easier to take care of his patients than someone of his own'. Whilst other characters have made marked emotional and psychological progress through the film as a result of their intertwined involvement in the drapes narratives, Stewart has, until now, remained relatively stationary. Nowhere is this more evident than in his parting from Meg, set against the backdrop of the increasingly desperate search for Stevie. This exchange is complicated and ambiguous. Meg admits to having enjoyed 'playing family again' with Stewart and Stevie (her son and husband died in a car wreck) but then to 'not quite' wanting Stewart enough to prize him away from his family. Then Stewart asks her 'What should I do, Meg?' After all this (Meg's immediate soul-searching, Stevie's presumed suicide, Karen's growing hysteria) Stewart, the film's one image of hegemonic masculinity has

learnt nothing, and still needs to be guided through difficult emotional terrain. Meg—manifestly the most mature character in the film—signals her disgust at such weakness when she replies 'What do you think I am?' as she recoils from Stewart and retreats to her car. Stewart ends up where he wants to be, reunited with his family and looking after Stevie. However, just as the closing title 'The trouble was over ...' that snakes across the screen fails to mask the problems that, through the course of the film, unravelled, so Stewart's reintegration into the family unit fails to repress our realisation that he has learnt little about himself, his family or the inhabitants of the clinic. Knowledge and personal development have been, throughout *The Cobweb*, caught up with the 'trouble' over the drapes. Stewart never fully understood this, and the film's final image—of the 'Chippendale Rose' dominating the screen—encapsulates both this and Minnelli's method.

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- 1 John Houseman *Front and Center*, New York: Simon and Schuster 1979, 457–8.
- 2 See Stephen Harvey *Directed by Vincente Minnelli*, New York: Harper and Row, 1989, 217–8. In addition to Dean in the part of Stevie, MGM at first wanted Robert Taylor and Lana Turner as the McIvers and Grace Kelly for the part of Meg Rinehart.
- 3 See Vincente Minnelli *I Remember it Well* (written with Hector Arce), New York: Doubleday, 1974, 284–5.
- 4 Lee Rosow 'Calling Mr McIver', *Saturday Review*, 16.7.1955. This review is quoted by both Houseman and Minnelli in the above.
- 5 Houseman, 458.
- 6 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith 'Minnelli and Melodrama' in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (ed. Christine Gledhill), London: British Film Institute, 1987, 74.
- 7 The last sentence of Gibson's book is far more ambiguous and reads: 'The trouble was over, the trouble was begun'.
- 8 See James Naremore *The Films of Vincente Minnelli*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993, 2.
- 9 Mark Shivas 'Minnelli's Method', *Movie*, 1, June 1962, 17.
- 10 Naremore, 3; Barry Boys 'The Courtship of Eddie's Father', *Movie* 10, June 1963, 30.
- 11 Harvey, 217.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 217.
- 13 *Ibid.* 220.
- 14 *Ibid.* 220.
- 15 Nowell-Smith, 73.
- 16 Vincente Minnelli (with Hector Arce) *I Remember it Well*, New York: Doubleday, 1974, 284.
- 17 (this is the review quoted both by producer John Houseman and Vincente Minnelli in their respective autobiographies for its positive conclusion that *The Cobweb* 'is one of the most rewarding films I have recently seen come out of Hollywood'). Gavin Lambert 'The Cobweb', *Sight and Sound*, 25:4, Spring 1956.
- 18 See Harvey, 217.
- 19 John Houseman National Film Theatre notes for 'A Tribute to Vincente Minnelli', Friday 5 Feb, 1956. The extract quoted is taken from Houseman's autobiographical volume *Front and Center*, but is not included in the UK version.
- 20 And Steve Neale expanded upon in 'Melodrama and Tears', *Screen*, 27:6, Nov–Dec 1986, 6–22.
- 21 Franco Moretti 'Kindergarten', *Signs Taken For Wonders*, London: Verso, 1983, 160.

Home From the Hill

VINCENTE MINNELLI, 1959

BY MICHAEL WALKER

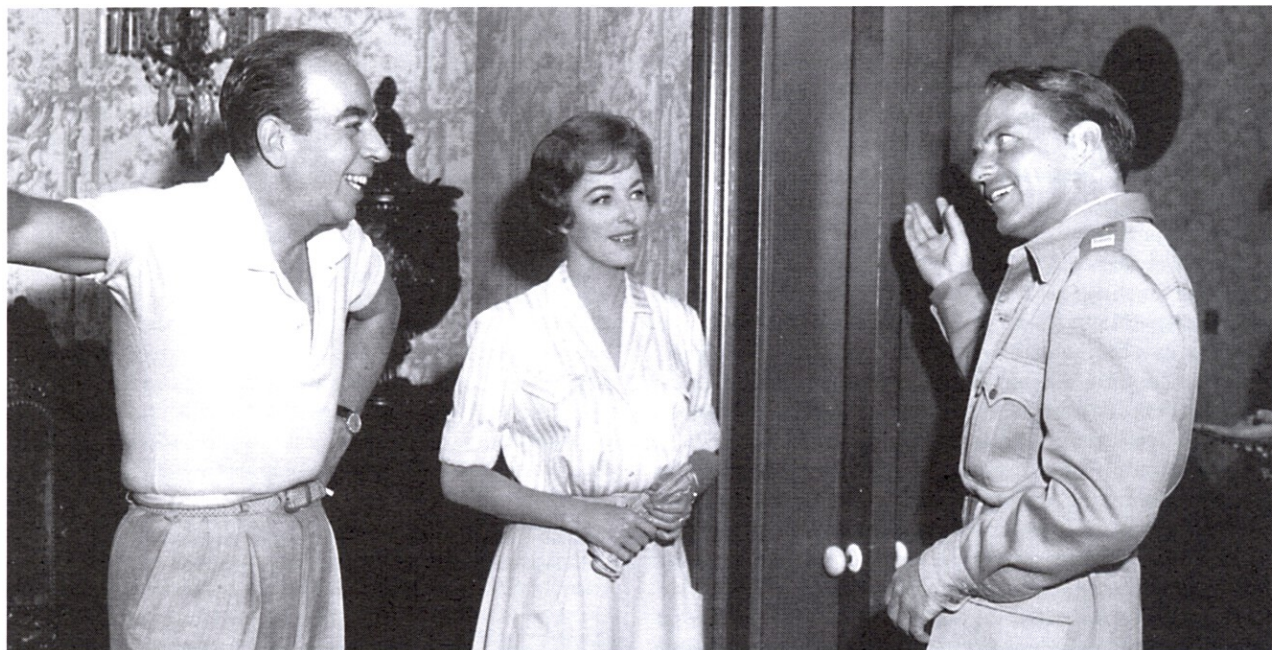
It is a measure of my esteem for *Home from the Hill* that I have already discussed aspects of it in two previous articles in *CineAction*, linking it to other '50s melodramas about a patriarch and two sons—or one son and one son-figure—in an article on *While the City Sleeps* (1956), and using it to illustrate my thesis about “Melodramatic Narrative.”¹ This article looks further at the film, which seems to me one of the great melodramas—and, quite possibly, Minnelli's finest work—with the richness, depth and complexity characteristic of all the cinema's masterpieces.

Although *Home from the Hill* has its admirers, there is little written about it, even in books on Minnelli. In *Directed by Vincente Minnelli*, Stephen Harvey makes a few relevant observations about the film, but his attitude towards the melodrama genre is patronising; in *The Films of Vincente Minnelli*, James Naremore only mentions the film in pass-

ing.² Indeed, the only article I know which goes some way towards exploring the film's achievements is Edward Gallafent's in *Movie 34/35*.³

Home from the Hill is a family/ small-town melodrama, dealing with a network of relationships around Captain Wade Hunnicutt/ Robert Mitchum, the major landowner in the film's Texas small town. Wade has two sons: his legitimate heir by his wife Hannah/ Eleanor Parker, Theron/ George Hamilton, and the older Rafe/ George Peppard, who is illegitimate. Rafe lives in a cabin in the woods, but although Wade employs him and allows him to hunt on his lands, he does not acknowledge him as his son. Aged seventeen at the beginning of the film, Theron does not yet know that Rafe is his half brother.

My approach here will be primarily ideological: I will seek to argue that the film presents an extremely sophisticated



Frank Sinatra visits Minnelli and Eleanor Parker on the set of *Home From the Hill*.



The Hunnicutts: Eleanor Parker/Hannah, Robert Mitchum/Wade, George Hamilton/Theron.

George Peppard/Rafe, the illegitimate son cradles his father Wade.



analysis of the competing ideological positions of different figures within the small town, through which the whole society is criticised. One of the conflicts is between Wade's set of assumptions as the town's patriarch—which he feels grants him both authority over and licence towards others—and Hannah's resistance to him in the name of bourgeois ideology, with its concern with decorum, appearances, respectability. Theron is subjected to the tensions generated by the contradictions between the two positions. But Wade's ideological position also contains its own tensions. He is the town's patriarch in the sense that he owns 40,000 acres of land which includes cotton, beef and other interests, but he also defines himself as a hunter—in effect, a throwback to the frontier days. It's as if he combines, somewhat improbably, the characteristics of both the fathers in *Written on the Wind* (1956): Jasper Hadley/ Robert Keith's tycoon and Hoak Wayne/ Harry Shannon's "Daniel

Boone" figure. Wade himself is perhaps sufficiently powerful to contain the two personas, but when he seeks to educate Theron to be his successor through teaching him to hunt, problems emerge.

Home from the Hill also moves out from the family to the community, and we see how other characters are likewise caught up in ideological thinking which, to a greater or lesser extent, causes them to behave in ways which are harmful, not just to their own self-interests, but to those whom they care for. Indeed, it's as if the whole society—with the exception, perhaps, of Rafe—is blinkered, with each character only able to see events through the distorting lens of his or her ideological background.

Although such blinkered behaviour is typical of characters in melodrama, *Home from the Hill* goes further. In an article exploring the melodramatic tradition in the Hollywood cinema,⁴ I argue that the film is one of a select

group of melodramas in which the overall perspective on the dramatised events may be seen as tragic (pp 22-24). The film does not simply depict characters acting out ideological contradictions, it also invites an analysis of what lies behind their behaviour, an analysis which reveals the ways in which the society itself generates and sustains such patterns of thinking. And, because of the particularly disastrous outcome of the characters' actions, what emerges is a tragic view of the society. The present article will also elaborate on this, and look at the factors which contribute to such a view.

Parents and Children

With those directors who regularly make films which centre on families, a specific parent/child bias sometimes emerges: e.g. Henry King's preferred family configuration is mother and sons; Otto Preminger's films are dominated by fathers and daughters. With Minnelli, the pattern varies: fathers and daughters (primarily) for the comedies (*Meet Me in St Louis*, 1944; *Father of the Bride*, 1950; *The Reluctant Debutante*, 1958); fathers and sons/son-figures (primarily) for the melodramas (*The Cobweb*, 1955; *Tea and Sympathy*, 1956; *Home from the Hill*; *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, 1961). There may of course be mothers in both genres, but they tend to be subordinate: the main inter-generational tensions in the films centre on the relationship of the fathers to their children, which extends, in *The Cobweb* and *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962), to father-figure/son-figure relationships. There are exceptions to this pattern—*The Courtship of Eddie's Father* (1963) is a father/son comedy; the only significant parent-child relationship in the melodrama *Some Came Running* (1958) is between father and daughter—but the pattern is, nevertheless, dominant.

In four of the melodramas, there is a young man (the main son or son-figure) who is markedly similar from film to film: sensitive, nervous, callow, vulnerable. The similarity is reinforced by the casting: John Kerr in *The Cobweb* and *Tea and Sympathy*; George Hamilton in *Home from the Hill* and *Two Weeks in Another Town*. We may indeed see him as a distinctly Minnellian figure, and, in each film, it is primarily in relation to his father/father-figure(s) that the traumas of this youthful protagonist are expressed. Thus, in *Home from the Hill*, Theron's story begins at the point where Wade takes over the upbringing he had ceded to Hannah when Theron was born.

Wade had ceded this control in order to meet Hannah's conditions for staying on as his wife. But we do not learn of the incident which prompted her demand—with its other condition, that Hannah refused henceforth to sleep with Wade—until over half way through the film, when Hannah explains to Theron why he has been treated with such hostility by Albert Halstead/ Everett Sloane, the father of Libby/ Luana Patten, Theron's girlfriend. Halstead violently repulsed Theron when he came to call for Libby, and Hannah explains that Halstead was assuming that Theron was promiscuous, like his father. To explain Wade's promiscuity, Hannah tells Theron the back story: the incident I refer to in my article on Melodramatic Narrative as the "past traumatic event" (1993, p 73). When she first entered

Wade's house as his bride, she had been confronted by the sight of the five year-old Rafe and his mother waiting inside. Wade threw them out, but Hannah was so appalled at this revelation about her husband that she "locked her door" on him: it was this which led to his womanising.

Hannah's locked door and Wade's womanising have continued to the present. *Home from the Hill* begins in the marshes, with Wade and his cronies out hunting. In the opening minutes, Rafe saves Wade's life by knocking him aside when a cuckolded husband tries to shoot him. Wade's sexual reputation—and the concomitant dangers—are thus made apparent from the start. The first four scenes—hunting; at the doctor's (Wade is wounded); Rafe drives Wade home; Wade and Hannah at home—are like a prologue, setting up the parameters of Wade's world and his status within it. Wade's cronies are also his tenants, and they are both deferential to him ("the Captain") and amused at his philandering. They constitute a little club, "the men of the town": we never see any of them with a woman. Rafe is protective of Wade, but less indulgent towards his womanising: we may not believe him, but he claims that he would have reacted in the same way as the husband. Dr Carson/ Ray Teal is openly critical of Wade's behaviour: when the latter says "I take it as my right to cross any man's fences when I'm hunting," he replies "Game, yes. Women, no." Hannah is even less forgiving: "Some day some husband's gonna kill you." Wade's womanising thus remains as a background point of disturbance, both in the arrogance embodied in his comment to Dr Carson and in the violence of the young husband's reaction.

Only after this is Theron introduced, and the parental conflict over him established. In his first scene, Theron is set up as a dupe by Wade's tenants because he is not "the Captain's boy" but Hannah's, and thus suitably wet behind the ears. It is Wade's experience of seeing his son thus made a fool of (trying to catch snipe by squatting with an open sack and blowing a whistle), together with Theron's own plea ("You're my father: how come I wasn't taught?") which makes Wade decide to usurp Hannah's control over the boy. Dismissing Theron's room, with its collections of butterfly cases, rock specimens, toy soldiers etc. as a "boy's room," Wade intones "I'll show you how a man lives" and takes Theron down to his study, with its array of guns, fishing-rods and mounted heads of wild animals. Edward Gallaent comments perceptively on the décor here:

Its basic quality is its turgidness, the sense that it is over-stuffed and dead, that its decoration, with its ranks of guns and bright red chairs, is a substitute for the sexuality which is repressed in the rest of the house. But, most crucially, it is a turgid version of the American pioneer cabin, with its collection of hunting gear, its inappropriately enormous stone fireplace, and three hunting dogs on the hearthrug. As such, it is an entirely proper setting in which to teach Theron to be a "man" in the sense of rejecting the family (1990, pp 68-9).

Edward Gallaent also notes that Wade's first "test" of Theron in this scene is when he has him fire a Winchester

carbine into the fireplace: "What Wade wants (and gets) is a tacit pact between the men to violate the hearth" (p 70). The shot may also be seen as the opening shot in the civil war between Wade and Hannah over Theron. At the end of the scene, Wade admits to Hannah that her upbringing has produced a "decent boy," but that is insufficient for his son and heir. Theron is too "feminised" and needs to learn the ways of men; in other words, to be a hunter.

And so, with Rafe as his mentor, Theron enacts his rite of passage from a "boy" to a "man." What is entailed in being a "man" in small-town Texas has already been vividly expressed by Dr Carson. Realising why Wade has been shot, Dr Carson comments that it seems "a man ain't a man round here anymore unless he uses up a car a year, goes down a road at a hundred miles an hour, owns six or seven fancy shotguns and knows six or seven fancy ladies." Although Theron's rite of passage hardly serves to transform him into such a caricature of a man, the description summarises the "man's world" into which he is being initiated. And the film shows how pervasive the workings of such a masculinist ideology are. The doctor speaks here with disapproval, but we note that his study wall bears, *inter alia*, a mounted stag's head and a rifle. He, too, sports the outward signs of a "man," is trapped within the ideology even as he criticises it. Equally, as noted, both men in this scene automatically use the hunting metaphor in relation to women. Even Rafe, who is capable of transcending the brutalising masculinist ideology, uses the same metaphor—albeit in a more light-hearted vein—when he seeks to interest Theron in girls: "I'll show you a different kind of hunting."

A significant point is that Theron's rite of passage is atavistic, following the principles characterising such rites in the traditional societies studied by anthropologists. Victor Turner has summarised the structure of the rituals:

Rites of passage... involve temporal processes and agonistic relations—novices or initiands are separated... from a previous social state or status, compelled to remain in seclusion during the liminal phase, submitted to ordeal by initiated seniors or elders, and reaggregated to quotidian society in symbolic ways that often show that preritual ties have been irremediably broken and new relationships rendered compulsory.⁵

Hence Theron is isolated from the town's community—we only see him with Rafe during the "training" period of the initiation—learns to be a good shot (a scene outside Rafe's cabin where he pots tin cans and bottles), suffers hardships (rattling antlers up a tree in pouring rain) and refuses the distraction of a "a different kind of hunting." Then, when he demonstrates the success of the initiation by killing a boar, Rafe rewards him with the symbol of his newly-achieved manhood: the boar's tail (equivalent to the ritual circumcision). It is of course crucial that no women should intervene during this period. The initiate is being purged of his mother's influence and, in Joseph Campbell's words, "all inappropriate infantile cathexes."⁶ The barbecue which follows the hunt—in which the boar is roasted for consumption by the community—is then the final stage of the

initiation, designed to reintegrate Theron into society.

But the reintegration fails. Theron overcomes the first hurdle—an adolescent fear of girls—by using Rafe as a go-between: thanks to Rafe, Libby agrees to be his date for the barbecue and dance. But Mr Halstead's violent rejection of him when he calls for Libby is a much more damaging setback. It is, in effect, the act which initiates the "melodramatic chain of events" for the film's remaining ninety minutes, and so needs to be set in context.

When Theron calls for Libby, he mentions to her father that he doesn't know how to dance and that Libby will have to teach him. Halstead's response is "What are *you* going to teach *her*?" But Theron is completely baffled by the insinuation, suggesting his sexual innocence. Moreover, we learn in the next scene (between Hannah and Wade) that Hannah was one of the best dancers in the county: why didn't her upbringing of her son include teaching him? With Oedipal suggestiveness, it's as if Hannah has pointedly kept Theron away from girls, and has even left him in ignorance of sexual matters. When Halstead's prohibition causes Libby and Theron to meet in secret, and this in turn leads to sex, it never seems to occur to Theron that Libby could become pregnant. It's as if he doesn't even know about the facts of life. Neither Hannah's upbringing nor his rite of passage have prepared him for an adult sexual role. Both Theron's parents fail him.

Although it is thus ironic that Halstead should see Theron, like his father, as sexually dangerous, in that Theron does get Libby pregnant and then does refuse to marry her, it would seem that the film is mapping out his destiny in very similar terms to Wade, who likewise produced an illegitimate child and then refused to marry the mother. But there is a crucial difference between the two events. Wade may have sown his wild oats, but he knew what he was doing. Theron, by contrast, seems unaware of the consequences of his actions. It is in this sense that he seems a melodramatic character, reacting "blindly" to events. But other characters are likewise implicated in the series of misapprehensions and misunderstandings which lead to the film's series of disasters. I would like to explore this through one of the film's main narrative threads: that concerning the fates of Theron and his parents and Libby and her father.

Theron's rite of passage is punctuated by a scene at the Hunnicutt dinner table in which we learn that he has been skipping school to go hunting. Wade protests: "don't neglect your schooling: that's gonna unlock a lot of doors for you." In the light of the repeated references to Hannah's "locked door," the metaphor must be significant. Wade wants Theron to stay on at school "Because I want my son to be a better man than I am. I don't want him to make the same mistakes I have." His use of the metaphor clarifies the unspoken thought: he doesn't want Theron to make the mistake of fathering an illegitimate child and then having to suffer a "locked door," i.e. a sexless marriage. But Wade is too late; in retaliation for his having usurped her control over Theron, Hannah—assuming that the boy would be grateful—has already taken him out of school. It is already implied that, apart from Rafe, Theron has no friends

(a consequence of Wade's status?) and now his parents' power-play over him has truncated his education, an education which might have compensated for the inadequacies in their own upbringing of their son. Once again, it's as if Hannah's actions are designed to keep Theron in ignorance. Wade's concern is justified: Theron does indeed then make the same mistake as his father.

The door Halstead shuts in Theron's face is the equivalent of Hannah's locked door: Halstead is seeking to keep his daughter chaste. But, in shutting Theron out, and thereby preventing him from visiting Libby "respectably," Halstead sets up the very conditions for Libby's transgression. The young couple can only meet in secret, a secrecy which clearly encourages illicit love-making. Thus bourgeois ideology generates a self-fulfilling prophecy: Halstead's conviction that, in Libby's words, "a boy only wants one thing" from a girl causing him to react so as to invite the very situation that he fears and so neurotically seeks to prevent.

But Libby, too, is implicated in the chain of events. Theron one feels would have accepted Halstead's closed door: the "gentleman" side of him would not want to make things difficult for Libby; the "weak" side would not dare challenge her father's prohibition. It is Libby who defies her father and goes to visit Theron and, in their subsequent love scene in the woods, it is she who effects the seduction. This raises the issue of an ideology which is only partly-aligned with the bourgeois ideology of Hannah and Halstead: that embraced by the young women of the town. Focusing their aims on marriage, they set about trying to "catch" the best possible husband. But the girls' subordinate position means that their tactics are open to male rejection. Libby's example dramatises the problems.

Libby is by no means reckless in her seduction of Theron. In their first extended scene together—in the Hunnicutt attic—she tells him about the preoccupation of her friends and herself with catching and keeping boys. At the riverside in the woods, she continues to make her designs on Theron clear: after she has prophesied a domestic future for Rafe—who has just happened by—and Theron asks if that's what's in store for him, she replies "Very likely if you hang around me long." Then, when Rafe has left, and Libby has aroused Theron through kissing, she pauses and explains the position she's in: her father wants to send her away to college, but she'll write. Only when Theron protests at this and says, passionately, "I don't want your letters; I want you" does Libby continue with her seduction. Having gained the statement of commitment she wants from Theron, she feels that she can "safely" make love with him.

An example of this procedure for securing a husband is set out in the First Part of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. Arabella's friends advise her to sleep with Jude in order to secure him as her husband, and her parents collaborate to the extent of leaving the house for the night so that she can effect her seduction. Nevertheless, however time-honoured the method, for a Hollywood film to be explicit about it—at least, with a sympathetic young woman—is relatively rare. Arabella is not a sympathetic figure: she only pretends to be pregnant and when, after marrying her, Jude finds

out, he realises that he has been trapped. In Libby's case, matters do not work out as she planned. We can see that a girl's assumption that, if she becomes pregnant, a "decent" boy would marry her, aligns her thinking with that of her parents. But, in Theron's case, matters are more complicated: because he is the son of the town's patriarch, he is a particularly good catch for a local girl, but his father has his own ideas about what's best for him, ideas embodied in the thinking of patriarchy: Wade's "I claim what I want to claim."

In fact, typically of melodrama, other events intervene and derail Libby's plans. Nevertheless the crucial point which upsets them is Theron's naivety: his failure to realise, when Libby comes to him later to talk about their future, that she could be pregnant. The breakdown of the Libby-Theron love affair reveals the ideological limitations of the thinking of the young people. His parents' conflicting demands have failed to prepare Theron with the maturity necessary for a responsible adult role: he's still too self-centred to understand what Libby may be experiencing. Libby's father may simply have wished her to go to college to complete her education, but it produces a counter-move from within her ideological framework: she'd better hurry and secure Theron before it's too late. So far as her future is concerned, she considers that she knows best. There is thus a subtext to Libby's manoeuvres which aligns her with Theron. For both, education is something they seek to escape from, preferring instead to rush into an adult role for which they are insufficiently prepared.

Libby's use of a mirror in the scenes leading up to her seduction—to attract Theron's attention from outside his house; to check her looks as she speculates at the riverside about Rafe's future—is also suggestive. On the one hand, it hints at her conscious deployment of "feminine wiles"; on the other, the second example helps highlight her ideological thinking. She imagines a girl taking Rafe in hand so he'll be "doing the dishes; taking out life insurance... taking the kids to the dentist; mowing the lawn." Because her attention is on her reflection as she says this, not only does she fail to register Rafe's heavily ironic "I can hardly wait," the film also suggests Libby's self-absorption in this domestic vision: this is the extent of a small-town girl's horizon. Nevertheless, it is significant that it is to Rafe that she delivers this imagined future, just as it is significant that Rafe and Libby meet in the film before Theron and Libby. Both are examples of the "prophetic structure" of melodrama: this is the couple who will end up together.

It is when Theron returns home at 2 a.m. after his love-making with Libby that we have the revelatory scene in which Hannah tells him about the past traumatic event, and he thus learns that Rafe is his brother. The scene is central to a number of threads in the film. First, Theron's return home here is an "answer" to his ignominious return home after the humiliation of the snipe hunt joke: we note that he enters the house here "flushed" with success. It's as if, unconsciously or not, he has responded to the earlier implication of being a "mama's boy" by proving his manhood with Libby. The parallel is reinforced by the similarities between the two settings: in the woods; by an expanse of

water (pond; river). Second, the scene occurs on the evening after the wonderful scene between Hannah and Rafe at his mother's grave, which has clearly served to reawaken Hannah's memories of the past. Since she cannot talk to Rafe about this, it makes sense that she would want to do so to Theron. Third, Hannah's story—like her taking Theron out of school—may be seen as yet another retaliation against Wade: she finally tells Theron "the truth" about his father. In this respect, she is quite alarmingly successful: Theron not only angrily turns against his father for the latter's treatment of Rafe, but also disinherits himself and leaves home. And so, as Wade points out to Hannah, it's a Pyrrhic victory: "He hates me all right. But he hates you, too, for telling him."

In the scene where Theron angrily confronts him, Wade is unrepentant: Rafe's mother was "a tramp"; Theron is the legitimate son "with my name and everything that goes with it: that's the way of the world." Wade, too, cannot but act according to the dictates of his ideology: he has his name, his status to preserve. Even the fact that we never learn whether it is generally known that Rafe is his son is a reflection of Wade's power: he does not publicly recognise Rafe, and so no-one speaks about the matter. Here, one feels, the interests of patriarchy and of bourgeois ideology coincide: Hannah would not want Rafe to be spoken of as Wade's son either. But this is outside Theron's understanding: when he tells his father that he should have recognised Rafe as his son (made him a beneficiary in his will; invited him into the family home), he seems unaware that Hannah would not have countenanced this. It is surely significant that, until the crisis when Wade is shot, Rafe only once enters the Hunnicutt mansion, and this is (a) before dawn and (b) only into the privileged "hunter's" space of Wade's study. Indeed, one could link Hannah's concern about the integrity of the bourgeois home with Halstead's. It's as if, in the small town, the bourgeoisie feels itself under siege from the men as hunters: presenting a sexual threat to the wives and daughters; producing illegitimate children who have to be kept away. This makes Hannah's final public acknowledgement of Rafe as Wade's son on the latter's gravestone at the end of the film such a powerful gesture.

Theron's flight from home—he also gets manual employment in a cotton compress plant—prompts his father to try and seek a reconciliation. When that fails, Wade goes on a massive drunk, to be rescued by Rafe three days later from the rooms of the sexually-available Opal Bixby/ Constance Ford. Hannah then has "a whop of a collapse" and Dr Carson steps in once more as moral adviser to tell Theron that, for his mother's sake, he should return home.

Both these parental reactions are typical of melodrama in their excess, an excess which focuses on the body. The contrast between them is likewise indicative of the types of character involved: as a powerful man, Wade's reaction to the loss of his son is to numb himself with drink and casual sex; as a repressed woman, Hannah's reaction is psychosomatic: her distress literally makes her ill. Theron can ignore the former—it is clearly significant that Rafe steps in to rehabilitate Wade—but not the latter. Again with Oedipal

suggestiveness, Hannah's hold on him is too great: he returns home.

But, with his eyes opened to the "true state" of his parents' marriage, Theron is repelled by the home life he now experiences. It is this revulsion which causes him to reject Libby when she comes to him anxious to talk about their future. This is the crucial act which sets in motion the tragedy of the last part of the film. But we can see how each of those involved in generating the ensuing chain of events contributes to the tragedy.

In Theron's case, the problem is his immaturity and self-centredness: not only has he not seen Libby in the six weeks since they made love, but when he talks to her here, it is purely about himself: he doesn't stop to wonder why she should be so anxious. In Libby's case, the problem is both her pride and the constraints she feels as a good bourgeois girl. Both prevent her from telling Theron that she's pregnant, but it is perhaps the latter which leads her to refuse to name the child's father to her own father: she doesn't want to use her father to put pressure on Theron. In Halstead's case, the problem is his humiliating failure to handle the situation he finds himself in. Having learned about the pregnancy, he goes to Wade, anxious now for Libby and Theron to become friends again. But Wade soon deduces the purpose of his visit, and so when Halstead admits that he doesn't know the identity of the child's father, Wade has no difficulty in accusing him of trying to "shot-gun an innocent boy." But Halstead, a shopkeeper, also suffers from the knowledge that Wade's status as landowner is such that, if Theron were responsible, he could get away with it, which furthers the humiliation.

In Wade's case, the problem is his high-handedness, which ultimately rebounds on him. As Halstead reaches the outer gates of the Hunnicutt estate, Wade, watching from the porch, switches on the lights for him. In its false display of consideration, the gesture seems to mock Halstead's departure, but it also serves to reveal him—now sobbing with distress—to a passer-by, Marshall Bradley/ Denver Pyle, one of Wade's tenants. Later, at the christening of Libby's baby, Bradley and the men of the town gossip about this incident, suggesting that it probably means that Wade was the baby's father. Halstead overhears. Although, rationally, he knows that it wasn't on this supposition that he went to see Wade, the fact that the men have come to this conclusion and are joking about it is sufficient to goad him into a frenzy. He ceases to be rational. To hear such gossip is to imagine in retrospect the extent of Wade's humiliation of him. He goes and shoots Wade. Then, completing the melodramatic chain of events, Theron pursues, hunts down and shoots Halstead.

The concept of a "melodramatic chain of events" is taken from my article on *Melodramatic Narrative*, where I distinguish between two types of such narrative. These may be seen, in an analogy with the primary and secondary processes in psychoanalysis, as an essentially unconscious narrative pattern, in which a past traumatic event compulsively echoes and re-echoes through the narrative, and a more elaborated chain of events, which is still "melodramatic," but which seems consciously worked out, lacking

the compulsiveness of the more "primitive" narrative form. I argue that *Home from the Hill*, most untypically, does in fact possess both types of narrative chain (1993, p 73). I refer to the primary type later; the one I am discussing here is the secondary, elaborated type.

I would characterise this chain of events as melodramatic because of the "excessive" nature of the actions and reactions which go to make up the chain. On the one hand, this refers to the overwrought emotions involved—Halstead seems frequently on the verge of hysteria; Hannah suffers two psychosomatic attacks—on the other, it alludes to the way in which the characters lack insight into what they are doing, and so contribute to an escalating series of misunderstandings, crises and disasters. Libby and Wade may seek to be rational, but not only do events keep breaking through to disturb their rationality, their perspectives are shown to be limited and partial. And Theron is a classic melodramatic character, acting and reacting without understanding. Minnelli makes a point of paralleling his hunting down of Halstead with his earlier hunting down of the boar, even to the extent of going over much the same ground. In both cases, he refuses to have Rafe accompany him—actually fighting to stop him in Halstead's case—and he performs both hunts with the same obsessive determination,

and kills both quarries with the same professional skill. Programmed as a hunter, Theron reacts as a hunter.

My overall argument is that the events in *Home from the Hill* are melodramatic because of the heightened manner in which the characters act out the contradictions within and between the competing ideologies of the time and place. There are several conflicting positions involved, but within the town itself the masculinist ideology of men as hunters, and of women as fair game, is set against the bourgeois ideology of respecting boundaries and fences and of protecting women from unlicensed sexual contract. And both groups tacitly accept that, if the boundaries are crossed, violence will ensue. It's as if the code of the old west still prevails; at no point in the film is there any reference to the law. Tragedy ensues because of the characters' mindless adherence to such atavistic thinking.

At the same time, there is both irony and a certain grim justice in the eventual fates of most of the principal characters. It is ironic that Wade is murdered by an enraged parent for a sexual transgression which he did not commit, but it's as if Halstead is killing him on behalf of all the cuckolded husbands and fathers of violated daughters over the years. He's also killed through hubris: his boast to Theron early on that he keeps nothing locked up (implicitly, no-one



Rafe and Hannah at the cemetery tending the gra

would dare to steal from him) enabling Halstead to enter his study and take a shotgun—which, moreover, is already loaded—from his gun cabinet. Likewise, it is ironic that Wade should be murdered just at the point when Hannah had finally agreed to make up and go with him on a second honeymoon. We note, too, the symbolic importance of the date: Hannah's first ultimatum was delivered when Theron was born; her finally softening on the day Theron's own son is christened. But Wade's murder is also a fulfilment of her warning to him in their first scene, a warning from which we sensed that Hannah was taking secret satisfaction. It is Hannah's intransigence—refusing her husband any sexual contact because, before he even knew her, he fathered an illegitimate child—which has created the circumstances which have ruined her marriage and alienated her son. She, too, contributes to Wade's death. Moreover, just as Theron's shot into the fireplace marked the beginning of hostilities between Wade and Hannah over him, so Halstead's shot marks the brutal end to hostilities. It is, again, ironic that it should occur after Wade and Hannah have agreed to a truce, but Theron was responsible for the act which led to Halstead's demented seeking of revenge, and his parents are deeply implicated in Theron's own failure to handle the situation he created. It's as if, at some level, Wade and Hannah's "war" over Theron has produced Halstead as a monstrous figure of retribution.

For Theron, the irony is that there was no need to kill Halstead; he could have taken him into custody. When he catches up with him, Halstead has lost his spectacles and is an exhausted figure slumped on the ground: even though he rouses himself and goes for his gun, he offers no real threat. But Theron has had time to see who he is; this brings in personal considerations. He may view Halstead as the person whose closed door began the whole thing, and blame him for his own current status as outsider. Harder to determine is whether he suspects why Halstead shot Wade. But he must know by now that Libby's child is his, so that he is in a position to put two and two together; in which case he would realise that Wade had been killed in his place. His killing Halstead could thus be seen as an attempt to disavow his own responsibility in his father's death by avenging it, but a disavowal which reveals, underneath, Theron's own guilt. In Wade's key speech to Theron about hunting, he said that "What every man hunts out there is himself." This, too, has resonances for this moment. Theron fathered a child in the woods; in the same woods Halstead thus appears before him like his conscience or Superego, confronting him with a responsibility he has attempted to ignore. Again, this makes the killing more personal. Finally, one feels strongly that Theron shoots Halstead as a solution to the pain of his current situation: living with parents who hate one another; excluded from the domestic happiness with Libby which might have been his. He kills Halstead because this will oblige him to go into exile and so force him, finally, to make his own way in the world. But the manner in which he does this is, again, atavistic, typical of the old west: he kills a man, and so becomes an outlaw.

Halstead's fate also merits closer examination. Here, it is ironic that he should kill Wade after Libby's wedding and

her son's baptism: two ceremonies which should have served to recuperate the problem baby. But the ideological tensions are not so easily resolved: the men's gossip attests to the destructive force of the masculinist thinking. And here, too, there are further, more personal, intimations. Everett Sloane plays Halstead as an impotent-hysteric, thrown into a state by as trivial an irritation as a sticking door. It would make sense for him to fear Wade's sexual prowess as a personal threat: could the men's gossip ("How many do you think he's fathered?") have suddenly triggered doubts about Libby's paternity? Moreover, could Wade share those doubts? At the point in their scene when Wade realises why Halstead has come to see him, he gets up from his desk and goes to the window. This connotes that he's thinking, but he's also turned away from Halstead, as if hiding his thoughts. Given Wade's absent-mindedness about his women—established in the film's third scene—is it possible that Wade simply doesn't know whether Libby could be his child? It's the uncertainty which is crucial: it would account for Wade blocking the development of the Theron-Libby relationship by not speaking to Theron; it would account for Halstead's hysterical reaction to the gossip. The uncertainty is woven into a number of details in the film—e.g. is Halstead's closing his door on Theron like an unconscious echo of what he wanted to do to Wade?—providing a rich line of speculation.

Brothers

In William Humphrey's novel of *Home from the Hill* (1957), the figure of Rafe does not exist. The novel begins with the return of Hannah Hunnicutt's body to the town for her funeral, fifteen years after the main events, which are set in the late '30s. The background to this—much of which is in the film—is then narrated. Here Wade's bastards are recognised throughout the town by their similarity to him, but none of them merits a speaking role. Theron in the novel is both a gentleman and a muscular hunter; in effect, Harriet Frank Jr. and Irving Ravetch's quite brilliant script splits off the calm, competent, backwoods side of his character and gives these features—among others—to Rafe.

The creation of the character of Rafe ensures that the film is a massive improvement on the novel. Without Rafe, the first third of the novel is just not very interesting: it's mostly sequences of Theron going hunting. Equally, there's no focus for Theron's reaction against his father when he learns about the latter's promiscuity: he just gets fraught and says that he won't go hunting anymore. To work through the problems experienced by Libby and Theron in the later stages, the novel also requires other characters. One of these, Opal Bixby (younger than in the film) works pretty well: her husband assumes that her child is Wade's (he isn't) and throws her out; Theron, thinking the same thing, bonds with the young boy, even eventually marrying Opal (but never consummating the marriage!) The other main additional character, the man Libby marries, is a total nonentity: we don't even meet him until Libby, in despair, decides that she has to marry somebody and selects an old school friend she just happens to run into. Nevertheless, the novel moves to a similar set of climactic crises as those

in the film: Wade and Halstead suffer the same violent deaths and Theron goes into exile (but here it's assumed that he died in Sulphur Bottom, the swamp). But Humphrey has no idea what to do about Libby (simply forgotten about) and Hannah spends the last fifteen years of her life in a mental asylum.

One of the many improvements from novel to film occasioned by the invention of Rafe is that *Home from the Hill* is one of the great brothers' movies. It is almost a cliché of Hollywood brothers' movies that two brothers will eventually fall out: that they'll end up wanting to hurt, even kill, one another: the Cain and Abel story. In a section on "frères ennemis", Jean-Loup Bourget in *Le mélodrame Hollywoodien* discusses this, and cites Minnelli's work in particular: *Undercurrent* (1946), *Some Came Running* and, rather differently, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* are all films which deal with brothers (in the last film, cousins) who are in some sense in conflict.⁷ Bourget also points out that another common feature to the films is the moral privileging of the illegitimate (or younger, or adopted) son over the official heir: one of the points I discuss in my article on *While the City Sleeps* (1992, p 69). Bourget traces this privileging, too, back to the Bible: "it's usually the son who is junior in terms of status who is preferred by God to the senior" (1985, p 45).

Nevertheless, although *Home from the Hill* conforms to this second point—the illegitimate Rafe replaces Theron as the stabilising figure in the next generation—the brothers do not seek to harm one another. Theron and Rafe's relationship remains positive throughout the film: they do come to blows when Theron stops Rafe from joining him in the hunt for their father's (at this point unknown) killer, but Theron's desperate "You've got to stay behind!" reveals his motive: he's protecting Rafe—now married to Libby—from a potentially messy quest for vengeance.

When Theron learns that Rafe is his brother, the violence of his confrontation with his father reveals the intensity of his feelings for Rafe. Indeed, in "On a Clear Day You Can See Minnelli," Stuart Byron writes: "after discovering that both he and Rafe share Wade for a father, Theron chooses to form a homoerotic bond with Rafe as demonstration of his defiance of his father."⁸ Now, this observation certainly ties in with other "homoerotic" bonds in Minnelli, notably the relationship between Vincent Van Gogh/ Kirk Douglas and his brother Theo/ James Donald in *Lust for Life* (1956). But, although Theron's initial reaction is indeed to go and join Rafe in his cabin, and this leads to a rather intimate scene in which Rafe tucks Theron into bed, this doesn't seem especially erotic.

In this scene, Rafe tells Theron of the jealousy he felt towards him as they were both growing up. Part of his story concerns the role of Chauncey/ Ken Renard, Wade's black servant. When Rafe's mother died, it was Chauncey who came and gave him the harsh advice that Wade couldn't: it was no use feeling sorry for himself: "Tears and crying and carrying on's a waste of time. Coloured folks know that and little white orphan boys gotta learn it, too." Although Chauncey also delivered the sort of admonition one would expect from Wade—Rafe had to "hitch up his pants and be

a man"—the film's linkage of Rafe's situation with that of the blacks is telling. The film only refers obliquely to the oppression of the blacks in the small town—e.g. at the cotton press they have the most menial jobs—but it does use their status as outsiders to comment on the shifting fortunes of the brothers. When Theron disconsolately returns home after Halstead has driven him away, there is a brief scene in which he stands looking on at the festivities from which he now feels excluded. In the same shot, a group of black children are likewise watching the barbecue from the sidelines. Minnelli marks the first intimation of Theron's future role as outsider by linking him with the socially-excluded black kids.

Equally, Chauncey is more significant a character than he might at first seem. When Rafe was "blooded" after his first major kill, it was Chauncey who did this. It is Chauncey who seeks to comfort the dying Wade when the latter is shot, reminding him of past trials on his hunting trips. Because he is unconstrained by the inhibitions and hang-ups of the white characters, Chauncey is able to step in on crucial occasions and perform the tasks they shy away from.

In my article on Melodramatic Narrative, I argue that the feature of the past traumatic event which triggers the primary, compulsive melodramatic narrative chain in *Home from the Hill* is less the marital rupture between Wade and Hannah than the casting of Rafe out of the family home. It is that which so shocks Theron, and which echoes through the narrative: "Hannah's locked door 'casting out' Wade; Halstead's door shutting out Theron; Theron joining Rafe in the latter's cabin; and, finally, Theron going into self-imposed exile. In effect, this final act completes the initial casting out, but with Theron in place of Rafe" (1993, p 73).

Crucial to the resolution of this chain is that, in some sense, Theron and Rafe change places. The shift is set in motion when Theron leaves home to become a manual labourer. But it is the coffee bar scene between Rafe and Libby which marks the crucial point of exchange. Learning of Libby's predicament, and that she doesn't want to pressure a reluctant Theron into marriage, Rafe gradually moves to the point when he proposes that he himself marry her. The generosity of this—he cannot assume that Libby will come to love him—is directly related to his own experiences as a child: "There're too many little unwanted kids running around loose in this world. This one's going to have a home. And a Daddy."

In committing himself to give Theron's child the recognition and home denied to himself, Rafe is also indirectly atoning for Wade: the child is, after all, Wade's grandchild. The theme of atonement is unusually prominent in the movie, providing a major positive thrust to the narrative. At the same time, as indicated, a strong sense of irony balances this. Indeed, these are two of the dominant modes which link scenes and actions. In the film's dense system of cross-connections, it is very often through irony (e.g. the success of Theron's first hunt rendered ironic by the success of his second) or through a sense of atonement (e.g. Hannah making up for her own and Wade's past treatment of Rafe by acknowledging him on Wade's tombstone) that the film's



Luana Patten/Libby meets Rafe at the grocery store and confides in him.

elements are related to one another. Sometimes, ironically, the atonement fails: as when Wade and Hannah's decision to renew their marriage is immediately followed by his murder. And sometimes the atonement has its own ironic undertow. The generosity of Rafe's offer in the coffee bar is not in doubt, but in marrying Libby he achieves, nevertheless, the home and family he had always yearned for.

There are however problems in Rafe's transition from Wade's hunting companion and ranch hand to Libby's husband: how does he now earn his living? There are also other issues the film leaves unresolved. Libby's parents move out of the house after the wedding so that the young people can have it to themselves, but this leads to a significant evasion

at the end. When Rafe invites Hannah home to be a grandmother to the baby, he says that Libby and he are "pretty green" with the child, but what about Mrs Halstead/ Anne Seymour, whose husband has also just been murdered? Surely one would have expected Libby to look after her own mother first, which would have included having her at home. It is not only the novel which leaves important matters unresolved.

A telling detail in these later scenes is the absence of the hunting dogs which were so important during some two thirds of the film. (Edward Gallafent discusses the significance of the dogs in the early scenes: 1990, p 80.) Rafe does not take his dogs when he moves in as Libby's husband, a

tacit acknowledgment that he is now a budding bourgeois, and has put away his hunting past. But more significant in terms of the dramatic events is that, after Theron's boar hunt—when two of Wade's three dogs are killed—there are no longer any dogs in Wade's study. Wade is still seen there, but now he's repositioned as landowner baron, working on business matters at his desk. The absence of dogs is critical when Halstead slips into the study to kill him. In the film's first scene, even with the would-be killer hidden, a dog signalled his presence. Now, there are no dogs to protect Wade. But could it be that, unconsciously, Wade is uneasy at the new bourgeois future which is on offer to him, and his oddly unconvincing failure to notice Halstead's entrance and taking of a gun is a sign of this? Or, referring to the possibility that Wade is unsure about whether Libby could be his child, that his failure to take cover when he hears the gun being cocked—he just turns and looks at his killer—is rooted in his unresolved guilt about the matter, and so, unconsciously, he submits to Halstead's revenge? If dogs had been in the room, their warning would have given Wade time to think. Their absence allows the tragedy to unfold, but it is suggested that what is played out could be, in some sense, unconsciously desired.

As Rafe takes Theron's place with Libby, so Theron finds himself in Rafe's old place as the outsider. After the coffee bar scene, we see Rafe and Libby move into the Halstead home. In the next scene, in an ironic echo of the coffee bar scene, Opal tries to chat up an unresponsive Theron in the bar. This is followed by a second scene between Rafe and Libby in the Halstead home: Libby has a nightmare which serves to bring the two of them together, and she now agrees to become "truly wife" to Rafe. At this point a cut to the garden outside shows Theron looking up at the lighted bedroom window. A car passes and, just as Halstead tried to hide from the light when he left Wade's house, Theron moves to hide from its headlights.

The link between these two characters is suggestive. Both Halstead and Theron react as social outcasts, ashamed to show themselves. But both are victims of their own mistakes: Halstead went to visit Wade because he had changed his mind about Theron and now wanted to welcome him into his home; Theron gazes at the window presumably because he has changed his mind about Libby, marriage and domesticity. However, Wade, too, is implicated: for his high-handed treatment of Halstead; for his failure to talk to Theron about Halstead's offer, which would surely have smoothed the way for Theron, as Libby's future husband, to enter the house he now stands outside. The patriarch's arrogance has consigned both of them to the shadows.

Nevertheless, the most striking connection here is with Rafe's description of himself as a child looking on jealously as Theron was treated to all the privileges of the son and heir that he, Rafe, was denied. Rafe and Theron have literally changed places. The sequence ends with Theron still looking at the window as Rafe puts out the light. A dissolve carries us forward to the christening of the new-born son in church. Theron sits at the back, thus completing the circle (Rafe's "I was there when they named you in church.") But the irony here is that Theron has denied himself the place

which Rafe now occupies.

After Theron has shot and killed Halstead, Rafe catches up with him and—as he does several times in the film, most satisfyingly to Hannah at the end—delivers the Texan version ("Let's us go on home") of the famous closing line of Hollywood melodrama. But Theron refuses: "I can't go back. How could I ever look at Libby again?" This emphasises that Theron's prevention of Rafe's involvement in Halstead's death has indeed protected him: he will still be able to face Libby. Equally, given the potential in such stories for a repetition of the traumas of the parental generation—Rafe, after all, is now fathering Theron's son—Theron's going into exile here is a way of ensuring that this will not happen.

In "Melodramatic Narrative" I discuss the ways in which certain younger generation figures serve to heal the traumas of the parental generation: Martin/ Jeffrey Hunter and Laurie/ Vera Miles in *The Searchers* (1956) (1993, p 71); Jeb/ Robert Mitchum and Thor/ Teresa Wright in *Pursued* (1947) (p 72). With *Home from the Hill*, I mention Rafe as the "healing figure" (p 73): he re-forms the family left behind by Theron and Wade. It is thanks to him that, in contrast to the novel, the eventual fates of Hannah and Libby are happy. (Also, in a small but telling detail, he'll fix Halstead's sticking door. In his calm, competent way, Rafe mends the neuroses of the parental generation.) But Libby is also important here. In conceiving Theron's child she is like Rafe's mother (suggesting that there are Oedipal overtones to Rafe's wish to marry her); in not—at first—having sex with Rafe, she is like Hannah. Hence her change of heart in the bedroom scene is a crucial step: symbolically, she "heals the wounds" of both the women of the older generation. Equally, although we do not see Libby after the christening, she continues to act as a healing figure: in the final graveyard scene, Hannah mentions Rafe's visits to the house during the long period of her breakdown, always with gifts, particularly of home cooking. When Rafe has persuaded Hannah to come and visit her grandson, Hannah asks, tentatively, "Would today be too soon?" Rafe responds with delight: "No, Ma'am. We've got turkey for dinner." And so it is to Libby's cooking as well as to her grandchild that Hannah "goes home" at the end.

Graveyard Scenes

Setting aside the special case of funerals—a "logical" way to end many stories, as in *Some Came Running*—it is surprising how many films end with a grave or graveyard scene. Honouring the dead in war cemeteries (*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, 1921; *Five Graves to Cairo*, 1943; *Saving Private Ryan*, 1998); communing with dead loved ones (*Ugetsu Monogatari*, 1953; *The Heart is Lonely Hunter*, 1968; *Everybody's Fine*, 1991); gangster deaths (*Baby Face Nelson*, 1957; *The Naked Face*, 1984); horror movie shocks (*Carrie*, 1976)—these are just some of the many examples. A use of the motif prevalent in '90s films is the grave as a site for reconciliation between the survivors of a trauma: *Moonlight and Valentino* (1995); *The Crossing Guard* (1996); *One True Thing* (1998). It is this category to which the final scene in *Home from the Hill* belongs, but it is unusual, amongst all

these examples, in preparing for the final scene with another major graveyard scene earlier in the film.

Home from the Hill is an extremely well-organised film: not only do almost all the scenes connect with and relate to one another in suggestive ways, but the overall structure of the film pivots around three successive scenes at the centre of the narrative. At the mid-point of the film is the riverside scene in which Libby seduces Theron (the crucial transgression, from which all the succeeding disasters derive); immediately after this is the scene between Hannah and Theron which reveals the past traumatic event. But, equally important, immediately preceding the riverside scene is the first graveyard scene between Hannah and Rafe.

A ritual which is explained in the novel, but merely shown in the film, is "Graveyard Cleaning Day," when the town's residents clean up the main graveyard. Along with other townspeople, Hannah has been tending a grave; as she leaves the cemetery, she catches sight of Rafe, alone, clearing a grave in an overgrown patch of ground across the road. She goes to join him. We learn that this is "Reprobates' Field", where, in Rafe's words, "They put the ones not fit to lie with Christians." They talk for a minute or so, and only at the end of the scene does Rafe confirm—we can see, from the way that she asks, that Hannah already knows—that the grave is his mother's.

This is the only time that Hannah and Rafe meet in the film before the last scene, and the fact that it is beside his mother's grave is poignant. The relationship between these two characters is particularly charged, and the scene reverberates with the suggestion of past pain even as they communicate a genuine, if awkward, sensitivity towards one another. By the time Rafe identifies the grave, the build-up of background detail has constructed a retrospective view of a life of misery and desolation: the setting; Rafe's comment that it would have been better if this person hadn't lived; the pathos of the inscription: "Cause of death pneumonia. Signed, the County Coroner." Then, as Rafe says: "Anne Copley. That's my mother, Ms. Hunnicutt. Maybe you remember her?", not only does this point to the isolation and loneliness of Rafe's life, but it also alerts us to something which only emerges later: Hannah's part in furthering that isolation: "Yes, I remember her." Whilst the film delicately avoids communicating Hannah's attitude to Rafe over the years, she cannot have been welcoming. Indeed, her crossing the road to speak to him here seems, in its sense of her crossing over from bourgeois respectability, like a gesture of reconciliation; as if she is, in some sense, acknowledging him.

The film's final scene echoes this earlier one, and now Hannah has truly made amends to Rafe. As the two of them meet at Wade's grave, and he invites her to join his family, he then learns that Hannah has already accepted him into hers: the inscription on Wade's tombstone includes the words "Beloved father of Raphael and Theron." At first, Rafe is shocked at the public acknowledgment, prompting Hannah's response: "What's there to hide? He had two fine sons." Briefly, Rafe registers the past hurt: "Not till today he didn't." Then, controlling himself, he delivers the closing line. Family unity is reaffirmed; the generations are reconciled, but

it is significant that this is only at the expense of Wade's death and Theron's exile.

Anne Copley's gravestone is small and insignificant; Wade's is large and imposing. Of red marble, it stands out amongst the others like a huge phallus, dominating the terrain. Even in death, Wade's potency is celebrated, and Rafe's name on the stone corroborates this: the challenge to bourgeois propriety is at the same time a tribute to the patriarch's fertility. It is even possible to argue that, in taking over Wade's widow and grandson, Rafe is perpetuating patriarchy. Only by ignoring the question of what happens to Wade's empire—will Rafe, through Hannah, take it over?—and focusing instead on family restoration does the film avoid the troubled issue of patriarchal succession.

Rafe takes over as the film's true hero in the later scenes not only because he has a balance and maturity which Theron so conspicuously lacks, but, more importantly, because he achieves a synthesis of the "masculine" and the "feminine" which defies the masculinist ideology of the men of the town. At the same time, the film, in Laura Mulvey's useful phrase, has raised "over-determined irrecusable" which put up a resistance to being neatly settled in the last five minutes.⁹ On the one hand, *Home from the Hill* works throughout to criticise the patriarch, and presents Rafe as a hero who is unlike Wade in his gentleness, consideration and sympathy. On the other, as the end approaches, it's as if the dominant ideology is striving to reimpose the centrality of the patriarchal line. Mrs Halstead is ignored because she would cloud the issue, which is to do with Wade's family line, not Halstead's. The final image foregrounds the issue of patriarchy: Wade's gravestone dominates its left-hand side; on the right, Rafe and Hannah "go home" to raise the patriarch's grandson.

Leighton Grist again provided useful feedback during the drafting of this essay, and I'm very grateful for his comments.

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- 2 Stephen Harvey: *Directed by Vincente Minnelli* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1989), pp 257-263; James Naremore: *The Films of Vincente Minnelli* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1993).
- 3 Edward Gallafent: "The Adventures of Rafe Hunnicutt: The Bourgeois Family Home in *Home from the Hill*" (*Movie* 34/35, Winter 1990), pp 65-81.
- 4 Michael Walker: "Melodrama and the American Cinema" (*Movie* 29/30, Summer 1982), pp 2-38.
- 5 Victor Turner: "Social Dramas and Stories about Them" in W.J.T. Mitchell (Ed): *On Narrative* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), p 154.
- 6 Joseph Campbell: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Abacus, London, 1975), p 117.
- 7 Jean-Loup Bourget: *Le mélodrame Hollywoodien* (Stock, Paris, 1985), pp 45-47.
- 8 Stuart Byron: "On a Clear Day You Can See Minnelli" (*December* Vol. 14, Nos. 1/2, 1972).
- 9 Laura Mulvey: "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama" (*Movie* 25, Winter 1977/78), p 54, reprinted in Christine Gledhill: *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (BFI, London, 1987), p 76.

Love and the City

AN ANALYSIS OF VINCENTE MINNELLI'S *THE CLOCK*

BY STUART HANDS

The song "You and I," as sung by Mr. and Mrs. Smith (Leon Ames and Mary Astor) in Vincente Minnelli's small town musical *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), contains the lyrics: "Time goes by/ But we'll be together/ You and I". In his analysis of the film, Andrew Britton points out that this song affirms the "normal" heterosexual couple (as defined

through the Oedipal narrative) "in isolation from society in 'metaphysical' terms of the triumph over time and adversity" (*Cineaction* No. 35, p38). On the other hand, Minnelli's *The Clock* (1945) is set in New York City: Removed from the spiritual relief of authority figures or the idealized small town community, Alice Mayberry (Judy Garland) and Joe



Joe and Alice make plans to meet later that evening

Allen (Robert Walker) seek such affirmative protection for their wartime union. Toward the end of the film, after getting married and spending the night together, Alice reassures Joe by saying, "Two days ago you didn't know anyone and now we're married. Whoever made arrangements for us are doing pretty well for us."

In his book *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950*, Dana Polan writes that "many forties narrative figures move in a kind of absurd existentialist space of overwhelming solitude where no authoritative law exists to give meaning to one's actions" (Polan, p205). It is the indifference to its citizens that makes the city pose as a threat to the union of Joe and Alice: The sheer multitude of citizens undermines their pursuit to prove their love in the eyes of an overseeing and controlling power. The city's impersonal bureaucracy nearly prevents the two from getting married before Joe must return overseas. When the minister finally agrees to marry the couple shortly before closing, he does it in a great hurry. As he presides over the ceremony, a blaring overhead train passes the window, muffling the sounds of the vows that Joe and Alice exchange: It is the technology of transit that is aimed to accommodate the mass crowds of the city that makes insignificant the vows that Joe and Alice take in the minister's office. "It was so ugly," Alice cries as the two sit in a cafeteria after the ceremony. In his memoirs, Minnelli notes his addition of a man openly eavesdropping on this conversation: "Their wedding [would lack] dignity; their starting out of married life [would lack] privacy." (Minnelli and Arce, p149) All of this "ugliness" is caused by the stifling presence of so many anonymous people.

Earlier in the film, as they sit in the park at night, Joe and Alice discuss whether or not their relationship was meant to be and if it will survive the war. Minnelli's staging of this scene contributes to its poignancy: In the foreground, Alice sits on a rock and looks at the stars and sky above them, while, in the background, Joe stands and moves about restlessly. "We couldn't not have met," Joe exclaims, "Your leaving home, my being in the army, getting leave when I did. That's all part of it... They all matter—this night and being together: They matter, don't they?"

During the next few moments of this scene, Minnelli uses formal expressionism (in an otherwise realist film) to depict the beauty of the city as a sort of sublime magic. When Alice explains to Joe that it is never silent in New York—that there are always sounds underneath the silence—they both stop and listen: They (and we) hear the sounds of trains on tracks, honking horns, sirens, etc. Minnelli, in his memoirs, indicates that, for this moment in the film, he wished to create "a symphonic piece made up solely of the city's noises" but was unable to convince the studio to do so (Minnelli and Arce, p148). But what exists instead is much more representative of the film's themes I have outlined thus far. As Alice and Joe continue to listen to the sounds of the city, they slowly wander this small area of the park, trying to trace the location of these noises. These random city sounds then swell into more traditional movie music. As they continue to move around, Joe and Alice soon realize that they have been moving closer to one

another. Minnelli delicately depicts this initial embrace. He shows us a medium shot of Joe walking toward the camera: This shot continues until he is in a tight close-up. We then see a similar reverse shot of Alice. In a third shot, we see again the close-up of Joe and we only realize they are standing next to each other when we see the back of Alice's head lean into the frame and rest itself on Joe's shoulder. The use of traditional movie music and these three elliptically-cut shots, discussed above, help to convey that there is something beyond themselves bringing them together. The use of music in this scene works in such opposition to our perception of Joe and Alice as two vulnerable individuals that it enables us to read this magical embrace not simply as fantasy but as representing an overseeing narrator watching over them, making sure their love is consummated and protected. This works against the film's depiction of the random and impersonal city. But what this moment—as their physical movements suddenly become synchronized with the music—also suggests, which I will elaborate later, is Joe and Alice's appropriation of that authority that they feel is external to them. Here, Minnelli's use of expressionism represents a subjective view of Joe and Alice's emerging sense of empowerment.

It is now worth noting a scene that demonstrates the film's depiction of the city's indifference to the individual and how Minnelli reveals a sensitivity for the couple and their context. In his memoirs, Minnelli recalls his consideration of New York as a third character in this film (Minnelli and Arce, p146). Alice and Joe walk down a bright day-lit street. It is early morning. The people passing seem unobtrusive and unimportant, as the couple's desire to be with each other seems especially strong. Alice says she does not want to leave Joe today. Joe is shown responding to her comment in the next scene that shows them talking while riding the subway: This elliptical dissolve between the two locations emphasizes that their connection with each other has remained untouched by the city surrounding them. As they stand, facing each other on the subway, Minnelli's camera does not move from its fixed medium shot position. As they then move to exit the train, the film cuts to a longer shot and other people become much more prominent in the frame. Joe and Alice are then pushed around by the passengers waiting to get off. Consistent with the rest of the film, it is the movement of the larger and anonymous crowd that separates the couple in the subway station, which, in turn, threatens to separate the couple permanently (since they don't know each other's last names).

What makes the city beautiful in the park scene is the fact that it is represented by an abstract "symphony" of sounds. In the subway, the city seems threatening and indifferent because it is presented as a mass of individual and conflicting subjectivities. As Dana Polan writes, "The city functions in forties narrative as a place of ultimate ambiguity, a virtual infinity of stories" (Polan, p235).

Richard Dyer writes that *The Clock* is "a series of vignettes culled straight from the imagery of the [Garland] small town films, rendering the anomic city into something more comfortable" (Dyer, p159). In the film, the city is redeemed in the eyes of Alice and Joe as the citizens conform

to their expectations of the people "back home". Joe and Alice's experience with Al Henry (James Gleason), the milkman, exemplifies this. (It is also conceivable that, for Alice and Joe, Al and his wife—the latter played by Lucile Gleason—function as surrogate parents who approve the young couple's union.) Through their experience with Al, the idealized small town community becomes realized in the city in the form of working class camaraderie. This becomes especially clear as we see Joe and Alice deliver the milk for Al. Alice and Joe become part of the camaraderie that exists among workers who have to get up early: We see them pass garbage men and wave and joke to other milkmen. This is a world that exists in a different sphere from the more apparent day-to-day reality of the city: As Joe and Alice first step into the milk truck in the late hours of the night, Al remarks that he just ate lunch, "This is noontime for me." And as they ride on the milk truck in the early hours of the morning, after delivering all the milk, they both acknowledge that watching the dawn come up reminds them of "back home".

The representation of children also works as a barometer of Alice and Joe's feelings toward the city. Shortly after meeting Alice, Joe attempts to befriend a young boy who reacts by kicking him. "I don't get it," Joe responds, "Kids usually like me... Out home they follow me around." And upon meeting another young boy, Joe makes him cry. But in the film's final scene at the train station, as they feel confident about what fate has in store for them, Joe smiles at another child, who, to his surprise, smiles back. For Joe and Alice, this is one last reason for them to feel assured about their future together.

It is revealed in the opening of *The Clock* that Alice has been a resident of the city for three years while Joe is visiting New York for the first time on a forty-eight-hour leave from the army. Alice seems somewhat cautious and hesitant in her conversation with Joe: She remarks to him coldly, "This city must seem strange to you." To her, Joe's small town boyishness and inquisitiveness seem out of place. In this scene, as they ride the double-decker bus, we see a transition in her attitude toward Joe from indifference to warm acceptance. In the middle of their awkward conversation, Alice sneezes and explains that the sunlight sometimes makes her do this. A few moments later, she sneezes again. "I always sneeze exactly twice and then I'm through," she explains and retains composure. An unexpected third sneeze undermines her composure and her "big city" resistance to Joe's naïveté. As they both burst out into laughter, the film dissolves into a series of scenes that depict them talking and joking in Central Park: These latter scenes reveal that Joe and Alice have much in common and can relate to each other's stories of "back home". Even though Alice never mentions from where, in particular, she comes, it can be easily assumed a place similar to Joe's pastoral hometown. Part of this assumption stems from what we know of Judy Garland's screen persona. Richard Dyer writes that prior to the fifties, "in the most obvious way, Garland was the image of heterosexual family normality." Dyer explains, "In a culture in which images of the small town and next door are the touchstones of normal life, stories

about girls who live in small towns and fall in love with boys next door become the epitome of ordinary life. This is the story of the majority of Garland's MGM films" (Dyer, p156, 159). But I wish to conclude this article by suggesting that Minnelli's *The Clock* takes Garland and Robert Walker beyond the expectations of their small town personas (as it was defined in their previous work).

After their modest wedding ceremony, Joe and Alice walk the streets and spot a formal marriage ceremony taking place in a church. Once the people depart, Alice and Joe sit in the emptied church pews. They then proceed to restate their vows. Alice reads from the church's marriage service, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God..." After speaking the words, "...and in the face of this company," she quickly stops and the two lovers quietly look at each other: They acknowledge that they are alone in this celebration of their union. As they continue to read from the marriage ceremony, with no one looking on, they appear to be internalizing the vows and making them their own.

In another World War Two home front drama, *Since You Went Away* (1944), Jane Deborah Hilton (Jennifer Jones) bids farewell to her boyfriend William G. Smollett II (also played by Robert Walker) at the train station as he returns to fight overseas. During this scene, the narrative is also concerned whether William's uncle, retired colonel William G. Smollett I (Monty Woolley), will arrive to offer his nephew his blessing and display his approval of him. In contrast, Joe and Alice's isolation from patriarchal role models leads them to begin to define themselves through each other—through self-discovery and mutual needs. This is very much apparent in the hotel scene in which they eat breakfast after having spent the night together: Minnelli's decision to play much of this scene without dialogue reveals the compatibility and comfort Alice and Joe feel with each other. The scene displays a maturity in both Garland and Walker's characterizations unlike anything seen before in this film and in their previous body of work.

The Clock's final shot shows Alice, after bidding Joe farewell at the train station, walking assuredly and triumphantly through the fast-moving city crowd. Minnelli's camera then cranes upward until she is merely one among the crowd of the city: Alice now re-enters the social world as a new and stronger person. The film is set during the height of the Second World War when there is a profound sense of loss and a need to have faith: For Joe and Alice, this faith is ultimately found within themselves.

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The Far Side of Paradise

THE STYLE AND SUBSTANCE OF *YOLANDA AND THE THIEF*

BY ALEXANDER JACOBY

Yolanda and the Thief (1945) is perhaps the most widely underrated and misperceived of Minnelli's musicals. Minnelli himself, who conceived the film in *avant-garde* terms under the influence of the surrealists, defended it in his autobiography against generally lukewarm reviews.¹ Bosley Crowther's description of "a pleasing compound of sparkling mummery and glistening allure for eye and ear, hampered throughout by a flat script which doesn't match the visual elegance with wit" still exemplifies the critical consensus: whether evoking praise or contempt, *Yolanda* tends to be viewed as an exercise in formalism.² My aim here is to contest this assumption. The film's script, while flawed by compromises and evasions, is not lacking in suggestive and intriguing elements, and the dance sequences, while remarkable by any standard for their visual flamboyance, are scarcely unique in revealing an imaginative investment on the director's part. While I would not claim that *Yolanda* is a masterpiece, I want to do justice to the integrity and intelligence of the film as a whole, rather than dwelling on a handful of eye-catching sequences.

The story of *Yolanda and the Thief*, adapted by Irving Brecher from a treatment by Ludwig Bemelmans, unfolds in a Latin American Ruritania known as Patria, whose industry and wealth are controlled as a monopoly by the Aquaviva family. When the heiress Yolanda Aquaviva/Lucille Bremer attains her majority, she returns from a convent education to take control of her assets. Burdened by her wealth, she prays to her guardian angel, and is overheard by an American con artist, Johnny/Fred Astaire, who, masquerading as the angel, persuades her to sign over her riches to him. But his scheme is complicated by his own growing affection for Yolanda, while she, too, finds herself swayed increasingly by romantic rather than spiritual considerations. Ultimately, through the intervention of a real guardian angel, a happy ending is assured and Johnny and Yolanda are united.

The early, most verbose, sequences of *Yolanda* are also the most conventional, but the presentation of Patria deserves analysis. It is a country where almost everyone is happy; we may term it a utopia provided that we recognise that it is a utopia constructed of conservative elements. Capitalist enterprise is undertaken within the bounds of a rigid class structure, and everything unfolds under the sign of the cross. The opening scene makes the religious-utopian dimension explicit: a teacher (the first of the film's benevolent father figures), conducting a geography lesson under a garish studio sunset, describes the country in terms which take on an explicitly providential quality (he speaks of "the

benevolent wind"). The incompatibility at this point between the director and his material—James Naremore has observed that "Minnelli and Freed have entirely secular imaginations"³—is clear as Yolanda, leaving her convent school, is comforted by the Mother Superior with the prospect of guidance from her guardian angel. The actress (Jane Green) is directed to deliver her advice straight and to speak with conviction, yet the context undercuts the effect of the performance. The speech is preceded by a brief scene showing the conclusion of a religious puppet play, after which the puppeteer descends with an angelic puppet and lays it lifelessly across a table. It remains in shot as Yolanda and the Mother converse. The visible artificiality of the puppet has a certain distancing effect as the nun declares her faith. Minnelli implies that God, like the puppet, might be a human fabrication, and this momentarily brings to the surface a subversive reading: that it is, precisely, Yolanda's faith which endangers her. Andrew Britton (drawing on the work of Norman O. Brown) has discussed the "mythological archetype of the tricksters", a figure with "connotations of fraud, stealth and deceit", personified in pagan mythology by such figures as Hermes and Loki, but "incorporated as the devil in Christian myth."⁴ In attempting theft through deceit, Johnny clearly conforms to the trickster persona, and the irreverence of his angelic masquerade also has parallels with his mythological ancestors and their defiance of divine authority. The Christian association of the trickster with the devil is also significant, and potentially subversive; the answer to Yolanda's prayers comes in the arrival of a devilish fallen angel, and it is, indeed, her spiritual credulity which puts her in danger of losing her terrestrial assets to him.

Yolanda leaves the convent for the not much less rarefied atmosphere of her estates in Patria, whose sumptuous decor is lovingly explored by Minnelli's camera—though at this point the director's visual flair does little to disrupt the script's conservative fantasy of a largely benevolent capitalist aristocracy. The Aquaviva house is controlled by Yolanda's aunt/Mildred Natwick, who treats her servants with insouciant condescension, confusing their names and lengths of tenure, and later berating one of them for upsetting her plans for a party by fathering an eighth child (she has, it seems, only seven ornamental floats assigned to his family, and "they aren't making them any more—please keep it in mind!"). Taken seriously, her behaviour is outrageous; that the film chooses not to take her seriously, presenting her as a comic figure, only helps to evade any confrontation with the values she represents. Yet despite their conservatism, those values do contrast clearly with the

Fred Astaire in the dance number 'Will you marry me?'





Fred Astaire, Leon Ames and Frank Morgan

ideals of American capitalism. *Patria* is a nation which has resisted the incursion of American cultural products. Coca-Cola is not for sale on the train that carries Johnny and his associate Victor/Frank Morgan into the country: Aquaviva sparkling water has a monopoly in the soft drinks market. As the train moves on, signs glimpsed outside the window advertise Aquaviva beef, gasoline, and airlines. Evidently, *Patria*'s economic organisation contradicts one American ideal: the alleged benefits of free market competition. In reality, the film's take on moneymaking is decidedly cynical. American enterprise is represented by the manipulations of two con-men, who describe this new country in terms reminiscent of those once applied to the untamed West: "bursting with golden opportunity, virgin territory, new fields to conquer." The phrasing is explicitly imperialist, and while imperialism in the Old West was commonly glorified by Hollywood, here it is subversively associated with theft, exploitation, and the stripping of assets from a sovereign state. Nor is the issue merely historical. The film went into production early in 1945, as the growing certainty of Allied victory in World War II was opening up vast potential markets to American companies, and barely months after the Bretton Woods conference of July 1944 had established the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the institutions through which the United States continues to exploit the developing world. Still, if Minnelli and Brecher seek to satirise the immoralities of American capitalism, the satire can only be carried so far. The script is careful to make its anti-heroes outsiders in American terms: they are wanted criminals at home, and *Patria* is chosen as their target because it has no extradition treaty with the United States.

Even so, the entrance of Johnny and Victor into the apparent utopia of *Patria* is the occasion for some gentle

mockery of their colonialist presumptions. In a sequence of two elegant long takes, they stroll through the town. Victor seizes a piece of fruit from a stall as he remarks, "This is the Garden of Eden... If you're hungry, you just pick your fruit from a tree"—only to be contradicted when the stall-keeper hurries up to demand payment. Meanwhile, Johnny hands out cigarettes and money with insouciant condescension. Later, as they set off for the Aquaviva estate, their negotiation of an advantageous taxi fare backfires; the taxi stalls, and they are left to push the vehicle the rest of the way.

These comic incidents initiate a central concern of the film: the way in which Johnny and Victor's arrogant assumption that they are in control of events is repeatedly shown to be false as their plans go awry. Thomas Elsaesser has identified Minnelli's "great theme" as "the artist's struggle to appropriate external reality as the elements of his own world, in a bid for absolute creative freedom."⁵ *Yolanda*'s con artists illustrate the failure of this struggle as external reality proves intransigent, and they become characters in the scenario of a more powerful artist figure. Yet creative freedom is not, in this case, their goal, but a means to an end. Johnny's only motive for creation is profit: in Joseph Andrew Casper's words, "To pilfer Yolanda's money, [he] must put on the show of being an 'angel', involving, at times, actual sets, props and lighting."⁶ Far from *Ars Gratia Artis*, Johnny is, if anything, a studio hack. The metaphor is sustained by the casting as Victor of Frank Morgan, who had played the title role in MGM's most famous fantasy film, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939, Victor Fleming). Johnny's creation of his angelic persona out of lighting, sets and props recalls the earlier film: *Oz*'s magic is also an illusion consisting of dry ice and sound effects, and the illusion sustains his power, just as Johnny's trickery enables him to obtain wealth. Minnelli himself, at once an *auteur* and a servant of



Yolanda/Lucille Bremer, Mr. Candle/
Leon Ames and Johnny/Fred Astaire.

the system, stands in an ironic relationship to the film's various artist figures. On the one hand, he satirises Johnny's commercial motives, and allows Yolanda's guardian angel to voice a nonchalant disdain for the con-man's second-rate performance: real angels, we are told, behave just like people when they go about their daily business. On the other, the superior artistry of the true angel (who, in order to foil Johnny's schemes, is himself required to put on a rather more convincing masquerade as a fellow criminal) does not exactly stand for "absolute creative freedom". Rather, his intervention ensures the customary Hollywood happy ending, so that the film perpetuates the traditional institutions of marriage and family.

Minnelli's *mise-en-scène* at once expresses and satirises Johnny's creativity. When he first contacts Yolanda, from a public phone in a hotel lobby, to initiate his pretence, wall paintings of angels are visible in the background of the image. Their style, straddling Italian baroque and Victorian Christmas card, is purely conventional, its artistic mediocrity reflecting Johnny's own second-rate invention. At the same time, its etherealised heaven contrasts mockingly with the con-man's decidedly earthbound machinations. His celestial masquerade is deflated as he emerges from the phone booth and the operator calls back to demand another five cents: external reality, again, imposes itself upon Johnny's fantasy. Even if the pretence is sufficiently convincing to beguile the naïve Yolanda, Minnelli does not patronise her; rather, his visuals express an engagement with her emotional commitment at the expense of Johnny's selfish masquerade. The contrast here is between the artificiality of the hotel decor, which Johnny will incorporate into his artistic design, and the three-dimensional reality of Yolanda's boudoir, whose textures are lovingly captured by the camera. Yolanda receives Johnny's call in the bath,

whose bubbles foam up like clouds; the setting seems another imaginary heaven, but the effect is not one of parody. Instead, the bubbles, which surround Yolanda and which would resemble clouds to the touch as well as to the sight, underscore the intensity of Yolanda's emotional involvement with the idea of a guardian angel (here as throughout, the visible conviction of Lucille Bremer's performance is crucial to the effect). The contrast is sustained as we cut between the Aquaviva mansion and the hotel. As Bremer sings the film's best intimate number, 'Angel, I've an angel', Minnelli focus on her rapt, unmoving face, and on the delicate motions of her handmaidens as they beautify her. The grace of the choreography here is intercut with Johnny and Victor's hasty and undignified scramble to construct a heavenly stage set in the hotel lobby, while the orchestration intensifies the gulf in feeling: Yolanda is accompanied to her car by a melodic, wistful instrumental reprise of her song, played exclusively on woodwind; while the con-artists' hurried efforts are backed by a noisy variation on brass.

When Yolanda and the thief first meet, everything emphasises the artificiality of Johnny's *mise-en-scène*. A lamp is perceptibly switched on to reveal Astaire in an aesthetic pose, seated on a golden throne with the hotel's cherubic paintings as backdrop. Yolanda herself remains below him on the stairs; as he announces, "You have trouble with money—I shall relieve you of it," and explains that she may have to sign a paper to escape her troubles, we cut to the reverse shot, showing Yolanda looking up at him from behind the banisters, which resemble prison bars. Here, Minnelli visualises the threat he represents to her, but soon turns the tables. Johnny is visually discomfited when the departing Yolanda kisses his hand. In the next scene, in the con-men's hotel room, he dismisses Victor's suggestion

that he's "getting interested", but as he walks behind the bedstead, he is in turn seen behind bars, which now represent his own fear of romantic commitment.

The introduction of a sexual motive into the film coincides with its first extended musical number, allowing Minnelli to give explicit visual expression to the more subversive undercurrents of the script. The subject of the film becomes the male fear of commitment, while robbery, subtextually, equates with casual consummation. The conflict between fear and desire is beautifully dramatised in what proves to be a dream sequence, though Minnelli does not initially identify it as such. In fact, his use of the long take logically precludes the possibility; after Johnny lies down to sleep, the camera pans in one unbroken movement around the room, moving from a close up of his perplexed, wakeful face, past the window with its night-time skyscape of Patria, over various items of furniture, before finally coming to rest on a red rose in a glass: the flower that Johnny had placed in his lapel after first seeing Yolanda. Next, his hand descends into the frame to pick up the rose; after examining it quizzically, he lights another cigarette and walks to the window, the skyline now visibly lighter than before. Lastly, he goes to fetch his coat before leaving the room.

As Johnny walks through the streets of Patria, Minnelli exactly restages the tracking shots which had followed him and Victor in their first journey through the town. Only the musical accompaniment differs: a soft instrumental reprise of Yolanda's "I'm an angel" which underscores the anti-hero's preoccupations. Yet only when, as before, Johnny pauses to give and light an American cigarette for a bystander at the street corner, does it become clear that we have entered the realm of his subconscious. His complacent gesture of kindness is subjected to surrealistic parody as extra arms emerge from the man's side, each with a cigarette for Johnny to light, until ultimately the man is swallowed up in a cloud of smoke. Likewise, when Johnny repeats his previous action of throwing coins to the local children, coins pour down on him from the sky. The parody stresses the hypocrisy of Johnny's charitable gestures: the numerous arms which emerge to beg for a light symbolise Patria's future poverty if he succeeds in fleecing its assets, and function as guilt images in the context of his dream. Immediately afterwards, a cut transports us from the town streets to an artificial milieu which begins more clearly to mirror the anti-hero's mental landscape: a gold-paved road whose hue evokes both the coins that have just dropped from above, and the Aquaviva millions which he covets.

The sequence which follows plays a series of variations on Johnny's fears of marital commitment and domesticity. The road leads him to an area of stepping stones beside a lake, where a group of washerwomen, dressed in red, scrub clothes to the rhythm of the music. First one, then another, impedes his progress as he tries to dance round them: then they close in on him as a group, their movements now dictating his steps as he tries to escape. Forming a circle round him, they trap him in the folds of their white sheets, from which he must struggle to free himself. Here the stultifying routine of domestic life is used as an emblem of Johnny's fears. The sheets which ensnare Johnny also visually evoke

the paraphernalia of the marriage service, a link made clear as he flees from the washerwomen into a more menacing landscape of red skies and black trees, where a woman, wrapped entirely in white veils, emerges from a lake. Pursuing her into a changed, mountainous landscape, he pulls off the veils to reveal Yolanda. A duet begins, during which she places jewellery in his hands; this occupies his attention completely until she steals up behind him and begins to sing. The number, "Will you marry me?", contrasts in its deliberately anodyne orchestration and measured pace with the faster tempo and visual intensity of the dancing which proceeds and follows it. Johnny's responses are tellingly confused. His first reaction to the proposal is to drop the jewellery in shock; then, as he moves again towards Yolanda, it is in pursuit of more chains, which she holds just out of his reach. While dancing, he takes advantage of their physical proximity to seize another chain, yet the choreography of their duet, as it continues, has a definite sexual charge. Sexual and material desires are conflated, but marriage appears the only route to fulfilling both. Though Johnny shies away from it, he is, it seems, both tempted and tamed by the proposal, even to the extent of voluntarily relinquishing his treasure, which he drops back into the chest before Yolanda slams it shut.

Then, in a sudden shock effect, filmed from behind in close up, a green, reptilian hand descends on Astaire's shoulder. The retreating camera reveals it to be a woman's glove; its owner, accompanied by two other women in colourful dress, drives Johnny into a dance of much wilder tempo, his movements totally determined by those of the female participants. This segment is perhaps the most ambiguous in the number. These women are characters without equivalents in the film's main narrative, as are the wealthily dressed male spectators who emerge to observe the dance. We appear to be offered coded insights into the con-man's past: a history of philandering and gambling (the men are dressed for the races) which tentatively fills in some of the blanks in a script which gives us little information about Johnny's background (and also glances back critically to the playboy lifestyle and persona of Astaire's thirties movies). While Minnelli's visuals are sufficiently suggestive to avoid any glib or simplistic psychological explanation, the sequence hints at the failure of Johnny's previous sexual relationships, and casts light on his present fears. At the same time, his compulsive desire for material wealth is shown in the light of former poverty; closely observed (indeed, through binoculars, so that he becomes the object of an intrusive scrutiny) by the watching men, he turns out his pockets, which are empty.

The emotional and melodic agitation of this segment is quelled as he walks away towards Yolanda, the music subsiding into romantic tranquillity. The stage darkens as a spotlight picks the couple out, and even the reappearance of the watching figures does not disturb their *pas de deux*. Again, however, fear of commitment trumps sexual desire. Johnny is shaken from his involvement by the appearance of three bridesmaids, carrying the treasure chest and some blue cloths. They reprise "Will you marry me?", looping their cloths like a bridal train around Yolanda; bells, superimposed

on the image, ring out as she and Johnny march up an imaginary aisle. Johnny seizes the chest from one of the bridesmaids and runs to the foreground of the image, but his flight is prevented as he is caught in her train. As he struggles to free himself, the mountains suddenly close in around him, and we cut to him waking in a panic, wrapped in his bedsheets.

Not only does this dream sequence effectively mirror the sudden leaps and uncertain connections of the unconscious mind, but also, the contrast between the bold abstraction of the dance and the banalities of the song serves a symbolic function. It is fitting that Yolanda's sung proposal, which represents conventional assumptions and aspirations, finds its voice in a register of lyrical and melodic conventionality. The contrast instils a subversive element in what otherwise might appear a conservative affirmation of the institution of marriage: the excitement and unrestrained energy of Astaire's dancing precludes any automatic acceptance of the song's message.

Although this musical number is perhaps the film's densest and most suggestive sequence, it is not an isolated achievement. The scene which follows deserves close attention, largely because it is an example of the expressive beauty of Minnelli's *mise-en-scène*—of a unity of style and substance—in a relatively conventional scene, rather than in a grand musical set piece. Initially, as Johnny (now adopting the alias of "Mr. Brown") makes his first visit to the Aquaviva household, we are in the realm of light comedy: his hopes to exploit the hospitality of Yolanda's aunt are repeatedly thwarted when Yolanda informs her that he neither drinks, eats or dances, "except, perhaps, on the head of a pin". While this is played for laughs, its implications are still reasonably complex. The way in which Johnny becomes the victim of Yolanda's own credulity is a sharp reverse, but the viewer is also aware of Yolanda's construction of "Mr. Brown" as a fantasy ideal. The sequence gains in intensity as the con-man gets down to business. For the first time since their initial meeting, Johnny and Yolanda are left alone together, and the choreography of the scene gives wonderful expression to the buried romantic tensions between them. At first, man and woman are seated at opposite sides of the room, Minnelli cutting between them in reverse angles as she remarks, "You're magnificent: you could deceive anyone." Taking umbrage at the word "deceive", he crosses to her side of the room as he enquires "Do you think I enjoy acting as a human being?" Although the distance between them is reduced, Minnelli's staging—Astaire closing in on Bremer from behind—still expresses his predatory intentions. His requests that she sign a paper giving him power of attorney over her estate are met with reluctance, but her excuse is that she fears he will go away if she signs. By now Minnelli is framing their faces together in a two-shot. The climax of the scene is played as a parody of romance: still in two-shot, Johnny asks, "Do you want to make me happy?"; as she answers "Yes", her face turns towards his to form the hourglass pose that usually precedes a Hollywood kiss, and music swells romantically on the soundtrack, only to be abruptly silenced as he says, "Then, sign this paper." For a moment she is visibly disappointed

before capitulating and leading him into her office.

If this scene depicts Johnny's cupidity using the stylistic vocabulary of romance, the next begins to erase the boundaries between spiritual and sexual love. As they wait for a servant to bring ink so that Yolanda can sign away her worldly cares, she shows 'Mr. Brown' "something which will remind [him] of home": a golden harp. As Johnny plays and sings, the motif of bars is revived, Minnelli filming Yolanda through the strings which seem to imprison her. This time, however, the image is richer in implication. The harp is, equally, the emblem of creativity, as which, it offers an ambivalent symbolism. Johnny, I have argued, is an artist figure putting on a second-rate show, but here, he is given the opportunity (his first, in fact, in the real world; outside the dream sequence, we have not yet seen Astaire sing, play or dance) for literal artistry. The words of his song foreground the creative process:

A poet once wrote 'Yolanda',
And then a composer came,
And everyone sang, 'Yolanda',
The lovely music of your name.

It may be argued that this flight of artistry, like the redecoration of the hotel, springs from purely commercial motives. This is fair enough, but the song also achieves a subversive fusion of romantic and religious implications. The harp, is of course, as Yolanda herself observes, the symbol of heaven, but the song which it accompanies draws in vocabulary and melody on the customary modes of romantic expression. The blurring of the distinction between *eros* and *agape* is something of a challenge to conventional Hollywood pieties, and it's worth noting that *Yolanda* is not only the story of a "potent male adventurer" (Robin Wood's phrase) resigning himself to settled domesticity, but also that of a woman growing from adolescent fantasy into sexual maturity.⁷ In this, sex somewhat daringly comes to take precedence over religion, which here is itself associated with Yolanda's childish naivety.

This is, however, only briefly subversive. The institution of marriage is the conservative answer both to Johnny's fecklessness and to Yolanda's awakening sexuality; moreover, any critique of religion is neutered by the presence of a real angel, whose active involvement is crucial to the film's happy resolution. Even the lack of ink, which delays Yolanda's signature, hints at a providential intervention; so too does the saving coincidence which follows, as Johnny throws a bag containing the stolen assets from the window to the waiting Victor, only to strike him accidentally on the head and render him unconscious. The bag is soon recovered by "Mr. Candle"/Leon Ames, in fact Yolanda's guardian angel, masquerading as another con artist. Subsequently encountering Johnny and Victor back at their hotel, he loses the bag to them after a (fixed) toss of a coin, but unnerves them sufficiently to make them resolve to leave the country. Instead, they are intercepted by the police, whose motives are unexpectedly benign; believing Johnny to be Yolanda's future husband, they have been sent to escort him to the Aquaviva carnival.

The carnival sequence which follows is Sternbergian in its visual complexity. The motif of entrapment again recurs, yet this time no one prop functions as its symbol, but the whole environment. Johnny and Victor, trying to make a discreet exit, are entangled in streamers, impeded by objects passed back and forth by jugglers, and trapped by revellers. Mr. Candle too delays them, trapping them uncomfortably in a doorway, and finally goading Johnny into dancing with Yolanda. In a number that segues from formation dancing to *pas de deux*, Minnelli recalls the earlier extended dream dance sequence both through structure (the music is purely instrumental for the most part, with a relatively short song in the middle) and through a visual echo, as a spotlight again isolates the dancing couple. But that echo underlines the contrast in mood; here, the mutuality of the dance is undisturbed by the emotional insecurities that underlie the earlier number. This number is basically a celebration of heterosexual love, with not only Astaire and Bremer, but also the chorus dancers, paired off together. Yet the contrast is one of style as well as mood. The dream sequence is a ballet, the later number a modern dance, and the connotations of the two forms are presented in deliberate opposition. Edward Gallaent has observed that "a sense of otherness of the setting[...] is not carried on this occasion by the dance itself"⁸: uniquely in the film, the style of dancing is redolent of modern America, where the ballet derives from foreign traditions (specifically, European; but the fact that it is un-American is most important). One may interpret the replacement of a foreign by an American mode as a stylistic metaphor for the triumph of the Yankee entrepreneur, who, in obtaining Yolanda, will also ironically fulfill his initial purpose of acquiring Patria's assets, albeit legally. All the same, such cynicism seems half misplaced given the visible delight which Astaire and Bremer take in each other's presence, a feeling which heralds the touching intimate scene which follows, as Yolanda confesses her love. At the same time, Johnny announces his departure. But he proves unable to complete the deception, confessing his guilt in a letter and returning the stolen assets. Yolanda, initially distraught, is reassured by her aunt, who describes the confession as "one of the nicest love letters I've ever seen."

It remains only to provide a happy ending. Johnny and Victor depart by train, expecting to be arrested the moment they leave Patria soil. Instead, a sudden flood washes away a bridge and the train is forced to return. Mr. Candle now identifies himself to the astonished ex-cons as Yolanda's guardian angel and the artist behind this saving coincidence. The ending is, evidently, a *coup de theatre*, and it's tempting to read it as a wish-fulfillment fantasy, defying a narrative logic which would conclude unhappily with Johnny and Victor's arrest. But it is not really tenable to assert that this is a reading the film itself offers; it is akin to suggesting (as William S. Pechter has done) that *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) ends "in effect"⁹ with George Bailey's suicide; which is to say, it means applying realistic criteria to a work which nowhere invites their application. In fact the film executes its miracle to protect the institution of marriage through the direct intervention of Heaven. Yolanda's guardian angel—the ultimate benevolent father

figure—arranges her marriage to Johnny, thus paving the way for Johnny himself to replace him as benign patriarch, and ensuring that he acquires her assets after all. The substitution is made explicit in the dialogue as Johnny vows himself to be her guardian angel in future, and the film ends with an idealised affirmation of wedded life. As he departs, Mr. Candle hands a photograph to Johnny, dated five years from today, which shows him and Yolanda posed for an idyllic snapshot with their four children. It's a witty grace note, but it nevertheless points up the film's philosophical limitations. A comparison which would have been relatively fresh in the minds of viewers in 1945 is with *I Married a Witch* (1942, Rene Clair), whose epilogue again leaps forward in time to show the father's uneasiness as his daughter begins to reveal witch-like tendencies inherited from her mother. Where Clair's conclusion challenges, Minnelli's reassures; marital bliss is not only anticipated in the happy ending, but guaranteed. Ultimately, the fantasy underpinnings of *Yolanda* allow it to evade the tensions implicit in its material, and aid in their recuperation—for which reason the film belongs, like its improbably redeemed anti-hero, on the far side of Paradise.

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Alexander Jacoby was born in 1978 and read English Literature at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, while catching movies at the National Film Theatre, London. He is now based in Japan. His particular interests include Japanese cinema, silent film, and European cinema before the New Wave.

- 1 Minnelli described the central ballet sequence as "the first surrealist ballet ever used in pictures", and took pride in the fact that "film buffs say the picture was ahead of its time." See Minnelli and Hector Arce: *I Remember It Well* (Angus and Robertson, London, 1975), pp156-7.
- 2 Crowther wrote in the *New York Times*, and is quoted in Minnelli and Arce, p169. For some more recent evaluations of the film as a solely formalist achievement, see Dominique Rabourdin's enthusiastic article, 'Détour par le Ciel', in *Cinéma 80*, No. 253 (January 1980), pp98-101, and Stephen Harvey's disdainful critique in his book, *Directed by Vincente Minnelli* (Museum of Modern Art/Harper and Row, New York, 1989), pp62-83.
- 3 Naremore: *The Films of Vincente Minnelli* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993), p64.
- 4 Britton: 'The Great Waldo Pepper', *Movie 27/28* (Winter 1980/Spring 1981) p6.
- 5 Elsaesser: 'Vincente Minnelli', *Brighton Film Review* 15 (Dec 1969) and 18 (Mar 1970).
- 6 Casper: *Vincente Minnelli and the Film Musical* (A.S. Barnes, Cranbury, New Jersey, 1977), p39.
- 7 Wood: 'Ideology, Genre, Auteur', in *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1989), pp288-302 (p290). Compare Rick Altman, who has described this trajectory concisely: "Yolanda eventually recognises that it is not the angelic in him that she desires, but the masculine traits of mastery and adventure. Eventually she frees herself from the constraints imposed by her convent school upbringing, while he resigns himself to the bonds of marriage, thus rejecting his wandering, lawless past." See *The American Film Musical* (BFI, London, 1989) p187.
- 8 Gallaent: *Astaire & Rogers* (Cameron and Hollis, Moffat, 2000), pp198.
- 9 Pechter, quoted in Joseph McBride: *Frank Capra—the Catastrophe of Success* (Faber and Faber, London, 1992), p524.

The Spaces In-Between

THE CINEMA OF YASUJIRO OZU



Tokyo Story, 1953: Chishu Ryu, Chieko Higashiyama.

BY ADAM BINGHAM

The recent, international centenary celebration retrospective of the work of Yasujiro Ozu, during which has played every one of the director's thirty-six extant films (from the fifty-four he completed over the course of his career), has been the perfect opportunity to assess—or perhaps to re-assess—the nature of the unique cinematic style associated with this director. After seeing so many of Ozu's works in rapid succession, and indeed after teaching Ozu at screenings and deliberating with such esteemed minds as Steve Neale and Graham Healey, one thing that emerged quite pressingly was the actual development of his style. Only David Bordwell's

Ozu and The Poetics of Cinema gives us anything close to a sense of just how the style that was crystallized in 1949 with *Late Spring* came to be; specifically how its central facets (the pillow shots, the 360 degree shooting space, the static camera, etc) were honed and refined from 1929, when his first extant work *Days of Youth* was made.

This, then, was broadly what I set out to (partially) rectify. I hope to have covered some new ground with this article, and perhaps to have corrected some long held misapprehensions surrounding Ozu's style. There have been surprisingly (and one must say distressingly) few new features on Ozu in



the leading film journals in recent months. But the retrospective has produced an excellent collection of essays published by The Japan Foundation as a programme for last year's 27th Hong Kong International Film Festival (the first to play Ozu's complete body of extant work). And also a piece by Richard Combs in the recent issue of *Film Comment*, in which he tries to uncover the Ozu behind the historical author usually taken as read; that is, the Ozu behind the dominant perceptions of the filmmaker that have been held largely since Donald Richie established an implacable currency for them in 1974 with his book *Ozu: His Life and Work*.

It is more or less within this context that my work was produced. Although the more overt pretensions to extending the scope of Ozu criticism (or scholarship), present particularly in Combs' interesting piece, are not to be found here, it is my hope that a better understanding of the foundations of thought on a director whose work remains vital, essential, can be at least pointed to with this feature. If it only heralds a

step in this direction, I will take it as having been successful.

I would like, at the outset, to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to Robin Wood, Steve Neale, Sheldon Hall and Graham Healey, with whom I have discussed Ozu at length and who all read and offered insightful and useful comments on this piece at various stages of its development. Thanks also to Richard Lippe and Florence Jacobowitz, whose suggestions made the work fuller and invariably better.

If one looks back even perfunctorily over the history of the reception of Japanese cinema in the West, indeed even at the indigenous reception accorded the acknowledged giants of Japanese film, one is, I think, presented with a not insubstantial number of dichotomies. In the main, at least until the mid 1970s, the overriding opposition that fuelled such intense critical and even industrial discourse seemed to boil down repeatedly to whether certain films or filmmakers were,

in essence (that is: style, subject matter, treatment, etc.), Japanese or Western. Indeed, where the three grand masters (Ozu, Mizoguchi, Kurosawa) were concerned, a simple line was conceived wherein the most Japanese and the least Japanese occupied either extreme whilst the most harmonious, or 'balanced' figure took his place at the centre. It should require no elucidation from me to grasp that Kurosawa and Ozu were the directors at each end of the scale, whilst Mizoguchi (somewhat simplistically) sat in the centre.

The result of this strain of thought, from Japan more than anywhere else, was that: following Kurosawa's great success with *Rashomon* in 1951, winning the Venice Golden Lion and the best foreign film Academy Award, only lavish and/or exotic *Jidai-Geki* (period films) garnered international distribution. The West, it was decreed, would not understand Ozu (it was a peculiarly Japanese mindset that if foreigners understood their art or cultural/social sensibility then they couldn't really be Japanese). And so, incredible as this now seems, it was a full 20 years before his films received any kind of sustained international distribution and exhibition, which roughly coincided with the publication of two books that were the first to look at his work in English in any depth (though articles, such as Robin Wood's¹ 1965 feature on *Tokyo Story* [1953] in *Movie 13*, had appeared before). They were Paul Schrader's² 1972 *Transcendental Style in Film: a somewhat strained study of Ozu* (and Bresson and Dreyer) in terms of narrative and thematic symbolism of Buddhist thought and teaching; and, more crucially (as he introduced, for better or worse, most of what is now common currency in English language Ozu criticism), Donald Richie's³ 1974 *Ozu: His Life and Films*.

What seems prescriptive about these books today is the extent to which Ozu's cinematic style is the focus of attention, as this has occupied a central place in Western discourses on the director. Although I think any account of a filmmaker deemed an artist must take into account his/her stylistic signature, with Ozu it is the case that his style, being so singular, unique and coherent, must occupy a central place in any account of his work. However, readings of what his style means or represents have generally taken precedence over any focus on its development over the course of Ozu's career. This is something that I wish to correct, and in doing so perhaps open the way for a much more detailed exploration of this neglected area. For the sake of clarity, I will first simply list (and elucidate on) the major features of the mature (post 1949) Ozu style, before offering an overview of the development of the major facets of that style.

The use of 360-degree shooting space—This refers to Ozu's habitual breaking of the norms of classical Hollywood continuity editing, particularly the 180 degree rule. In his mature films he conceives of the space of a scene as circular rather than semi-circular and cuts generally on 90 and 180-degrees. This gives rise to effects such as 'incorrect' screen direction and mismatched eye-lines.

The use of transition [or "pillow"⁴ or "intermediate"⁵] shots—This is Ozu's most celebrated stylistic feature. His mature films are rife with shots, sometimes to connect scenes and sometimes in the middle of scenes, of diegetic

objects and of landscapes. They are, as Bordwell & Thompson term it, "wedged in"⁶ to the narrative, and have many subtle variations and permutations.

A predominantly static camera—It is another much remarked upon Ozu trait that the camera rarely moves, but this is a feature of his cinema that was refined over the course of his entire career (more of which later).

Low camera height [generally about three feet from the floor]—Most commentators (far too many, in fact) refer to Ozu's low camera *angle*, but it should be stressed that it is commonly only at a low height. The general (over-used, I think) view is that this replicates the eye view of a Japanese seated on a Tatami mat. There may be something to this, but the crucial point is that one is presented with a rigorous, consistent perspective and view of the world, which I take (perhaps tentatively, and indeed not necessarily consciously on Ozu's part) to be a system that works to some extent in almost diametric opposition to the mimetic, perspectivalist theory of classical cinema famously advocated by V.I. Pudovkin, in which the viewer, like the ideal "Invisible spectator,"⁷ is positioned by the text to observe the unfolding action from the best possible vantage point: they are "Ideally mobile in space and time."⁸ Of course this could be applied to Ozu in certain ways, but, in others, a striking dichotomy opens up. To take two examples (that digress from the topic of this paragraph but nevertheless underline the theory): the imaginary observer watching a dialogue exchange between two people would naturally glance from one to the other without moving; that is, from the same side of each person (the 180 degree line). Ozu's mature films, as outlined above, adhere to this 'rule' extremely little, and so would construct an observer dashing in between the talkers for no reason, doing far more work than is necessary to simply hear what each participant in the conversation is saying and how the other is reacting. Secondly (and more broadly), Ozu's elliptical narrative construction (see below) clearly highlights that the viewer of his films is not mobile in space and time. We have no power of omniscience over narrative events.

Camera placed in front of characters in dialogue scenes—Another reinforcement of the above, this technique has characters seemingly addressing the camera directly when talking.

The absence of fades, dissolves, close-ups or P.O.V. shots—Again this is not as strictly the case in the earlier, 1930s films, where these techniques are discernible, if still relatively sparsely deployed.

Symmetrical editing and presentation of space—This is not as prevalent as other features of Ozu's style, but is nonetheless not uncommon. The clearest instance of its usage, in *Tokyo Story*, has Koichi/So Yamamura, the doctor with whom his parents are staying, go upstairs to find his mother, then call outside to his father who is sitting on the laundry platform outside, to ask them to both go downstairs with him to the baths. A long shot of Koichi beginning to climb the stairs cuts to a long shot in the room in which his mother Tomi/Chieko Higashiyama is sitting just before Koichi enters and walks over to her. After a short, five shot dialogue exchange, the same initial LS then sees Koichi

exit screen right and, over a cut, enter screen left in another LS in the adjoining room, wherein he leans out of the window and calls to his father. Cut to the father, Shukichi/Chishu Ryu, outside who acknowledges his son. Cut to the same shot of Koichi who asks his father about the baths. Cut again to the same shot of Shukichi as he makes his way down the small ladder and into the house. Cut to the same shot as before with Koichi as Shukichi comes into the room and makes his way (screen left) to the room where his wife and Koichi are. Cut to the same shot in that room as before where the three characters (after a short preparation) leave to go downstairs. Finally, cut back to the very same long shot that initially framed Koichi as he began to go upstairs, as he and his mother and father come back into the room from the staircase.

Editing that respects each character's time to talk— This is not a great way of describing this technique, but a greater one escapes me. It simply refers to Ozu's method of cutting to characters before they begin to speak, in pre-emption of their dialogue, and not leaving them until they have said all they want/need to (this could be argued to contradict my earlier theory of Ozu, breaking the invisible observer theory, but the position of the camera generally does not observe where such a theoretical construct would be to view each speaker).

Centrifugal compositions/use of off-screen space— Compositions in the mature Ozu films tend to be, as Andre Bazin defined them,⁹ centrifugal. That is, they are open and allude to the world outside the frame. The compositions in the mature films will not draw one's eyes in to the centre of the frame, but outward, off screen, as it were off camera. The 360 degree shooting space and the transition shots reinforce this notion as they both work to bring the absolute entirety of any location into being, both inside [the majority of the mature Ozu films generally take place in interiors] and outside, as this is generally [though by no means always] where transition shots take the viewer. Other factors contribute to this also, such as the sounds of off-screen objects [for example the passing trains and chugging boats in *Tokyo Story*] heard in the background throughout scenes.

Open and often overt, parametric narration—David Bordwell¹⁰ in particular has written extensively and exhaustively on narration in Ozu's films, indeed narration in films in general¹¹. The most common features of the mature Ozu films in this respect are narration that will "move freely among characters¹²", highlighting their thoughts, feelings and emotions, and often allowing the viewer more information than any particular character. The narration is called attention to with techniques like transition shots and, especially, the syuzhet's elisions of fabula events [more below]. There is also a sense in which Ozu's style becomes fore-grounded as an end in itself: as the focal point of a scene (the graphic matches—see below—are the greatest example of this).

Graphic match contiguity editing—Editing so as to create strong visual links across a cut [like the bone to the space ship in *2001: A Space Odyssey*]. With Ozu this is more often than not achieved through character placement

and crossing the axis of action.

Narrative built around ellipses, symmetry and a de-centered syuzhet—It could well be remarked of Ozu's mature films that they are made up, to an extent, of scenes that other [Western] filmmakers would elide [Ozu's influence can in this respect be seen in the work of contemporary Asian filmmakers like Hou Hsiao-hsien and Tran Anh Hung]. Often, in the later work, important actions are built up to, elided, and then remarked upon after the fact. Examples would be the elderly couple's stopover to see their youngest son in *Tokyo Story* and, most prominently, the wedding of the daughter in both *Late Spring* [1949] and *An Autumn Afternoon* [1962]. The mature Ozu film is also predicated to a very great degree upon symmetry and parallels to elucidate characters. For instance, in *An Autumn Afternoon* the ageing father Hirayama/Chishu Ryu, who is being pressured by his friends to marry off his daughter before it is too late, is explicitly contrasted with both his old teacher Sakuma/Eijiro Yono, who's daughter is now an old maid because he didn't marry her off at the right time, and his friend professor Horie/Ryuji Kita, who has decided, after being left alone when his daughter has married, to get married himself to a woman much younger than he is. In other words these characters represents different futures for the protagonist. Finally, tight, causal plotting is not a feature of Ozu's mature films. He said himself that pictures with obvious plots bored him¹³, and though plots are certainly discernible in his later work, they are not the structuring principle by which he builds his films.

It should perhaps go without saying that some of the elements of Ozu's cinematic vocabulary have been more common over the course of his career than others, and that some have been much more rigorously adhered to. But the above-noted features may be taken to be the major components of the Ozu style.

The Evolution Of Ozu's Style

It should be made clear before beginning that Ozu's cinematic techniques cannot be seen as simply developing from film to film throughout his career until they reach their zenith and form part of THE Ozu style. One of Donald Richie's most perceptive comments in his book is the stress he lays on Ozu's continuing development as an artist¹⁴. One cannot, as Noel Burch does in *To The Distant Observer*¹⁵, see Ozu's style as ever really reaching a point where it becomes closed and hermetic, crystallized and unchanging (though the late colour films seem to me slightly more overtly schematic). The "academicism"¹⁶ that Burch notes in the post-war works would anyway seem to me to be at least qualified (if not completely overturned) by looking at the way Ozu began to use colour in his final six films, beginning with *Equinox Flower* in 1958, and also the further refinement of his transition shots and his more explicit front-on camera and graphic matching in these films.

Another important point to stress regarding style is that the majority of critics would most likely concur as to the most prevalent elements of that style, although most of its techniques appear in some capacity at some time or another

Late Spring, 1949 Noriko (Setsuko Hara) preparing for her wedding.



in the extant films from Ozu's first ten years as a director. This decade can be characterised to some extent by its experimental nature (generic as well as stylistic), which is unsurprising given the sheer volume of material Ozu was turning out, but these films, even as early as 1929, can also clearly be seen to lay the foundations for the style that emerged in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Ozu's much noted and discussed use of 360 degree shooting space and his completely singular transition shots are the first of his stylistic traits to emerge, although both are applied sparingly and inconsistently, and the films before at least 1933 are more likely to adhere to the classical

paradigm's 180 degree rule than transgress it and generally contain fewer transition shots (some, like *I Flunked, But...* [1930] and *The Lady and The Beard* [1931] have none at all).

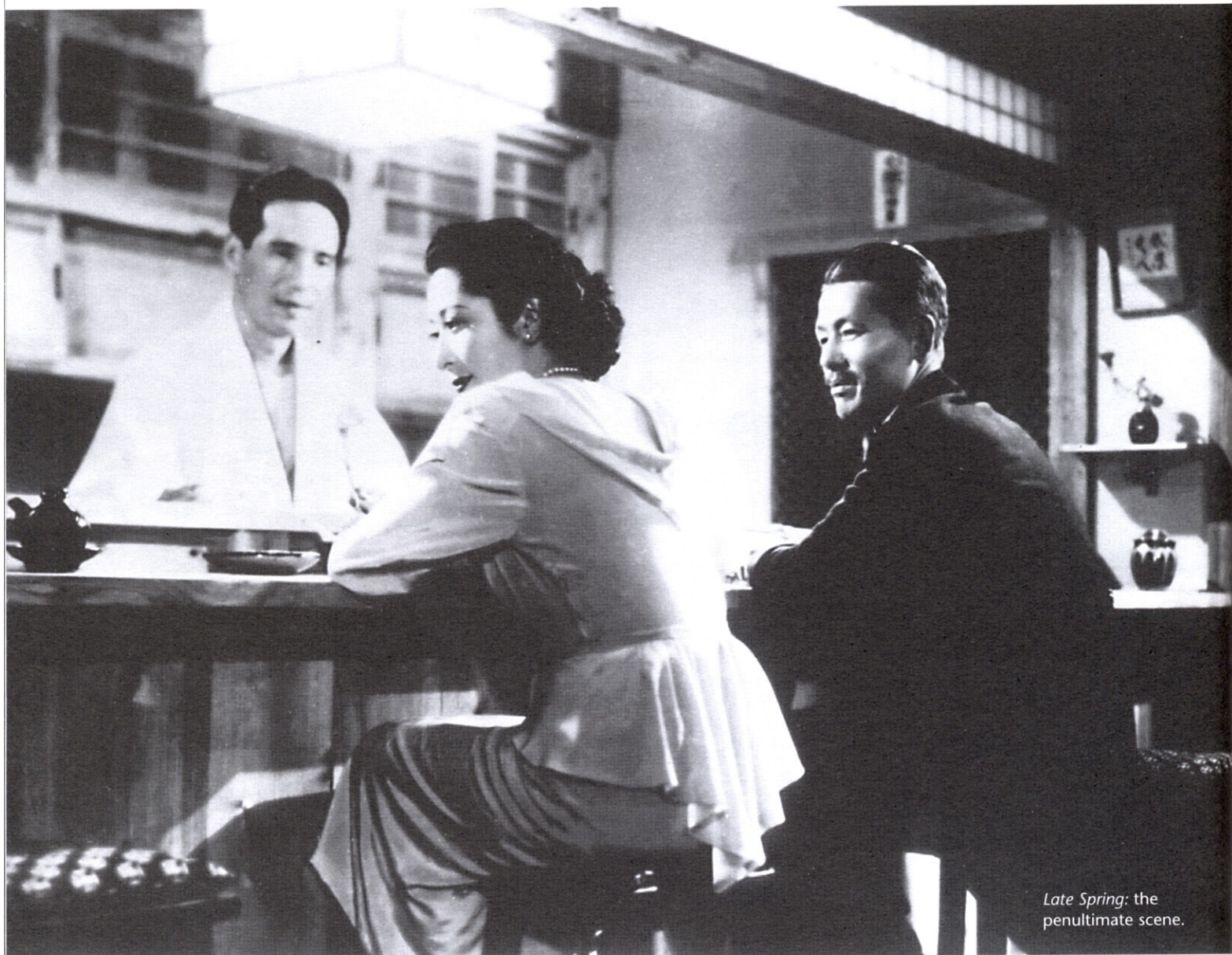
The 360-degree shooting seems to creep into Ozu's work in the early 1930s and only becomes consistent in his films after 1933 and *Woman Of Tokyo* and *Dragnet Girl*. Ozu's earliest extant film, the Harold Lloyd-esque student comedy *Days Of Youth* [1929], is edited almost entirely according to classical continuity conventions (Ozu's immense love of American cinema and its influence on his early work have been much noted), most apparently 180 degree rule

shot/reverse shot cutting and thus 'correct' screen direction, a conventional analytical breakdown of space, and establishing and re-establishing shots. Subsequent comedies, such as *I Flunked, But...*, *The Lady and The Beard*, *Tokyo Chorus* [1931] and *Where Now Are The Dreams Of Youth?* [1932], also tend to deviate comparatively little from this pattern (*I Was Born, But...* [1932] is the exception here as its 180 degree cuts, while still not used throughout, are much more overt, and Ozu crosses the axis of action and uses 90 and 180-degree cuts more in this film).

There are traces of 360 degree shooting in Ozu's two crime films of 1930: *Walk Cheerfully* [1930] and *That Night's Wife* [1930], but they tend to be restricted to jumps over the

axis of action in shot/reverse shot cutting for two-person dialogue scenes. *That Night's Wife*, which is set largely in a cramped little flat, does go further in that the entire space of the flat is presented on all sides of the characters, which is more than would be expected in a Hollywood film. Also, Ozu scrupulously avoids establishing shots, preferring instead (in a way very much akin to his later work) to use objects like a bed and a table for spatial orientation.

The next important Ozu film in terms of his editing style (after *I Was Born, But...* which will be discussed later) is one of the films Noel Burch discusses most in *To The Distant Observer*¹⁷, and one that can be seen, to a large extent, as setting the pattern for the films of the 1930s to come:



Late Spring: the penultimate scene.

Woman Of Tokyo in 1933. The film tells the story of a student who believes his sister to be a prostitute and who eventually commits suicide, and contains more 360 degree shooting than any Ozu film before it (though there is still a good deal of 180 degree rule shooting in it, principally in two-person dialogue scenes).

Typical of the unconventional editing of the film is the scene in which the protagonist Ryoichi's/Ureo Egawa's girlfriend Harue/Kinuyo Tanaka (later star of many of Mizoguchi's films) returns home and is told by her police officer brother that her boyfriend's sister Chikako/Yoshiko Okada is a suspected prostitute. It begins as follows:

MS of officer Kinoshita/Shinyo Nara, diagonally on from over his left shoulder. 180-degree match on action cut to a MLS of Kinoshita as he sits down, he is now seen in three quarter profile from his right side. MS of Harue entering through a door to Kinoshita's left. LS of him cut almost 180 degrees again, so that he is now seen in profile from his left side. Harue walks over to him. MS of Kinoshita, again in three quarter profile on his left, looking up at Harue. MS three quarter profile shot of Harue [correct screen direction]. Match on action cut to a LS taken from directly in front of Kino-shita as Harue walks past him. This is a 90-degree cut from the last but one shot of Kinoshita

This kind of editing is seen in various scenes throughout *Woman Of Tokyo*, and is further refined in Ozu's very next film, *Dragnet Girl*, which is another crime/gangster drama. In this, practically all the dialogue scenes (which were quite often shot in accordance with the 180-degree rule in *Woman Of Tokyo*) utilise 90 and 180-degree cutting, and like *That Night's Wife*, spatial orientation is anchored through objects.

These two films then set the pattern of editing that would continue throughout Ozu's 1930's work in films like *An Inn In Tokyo* [1935] and *The Only Son* [1936], so that by the time one reaches his final pre-war film *What Did The Lady Forget?* [1937], his editing is looking much like it will in the mature, post-war years. The second scene in this movie, as one of the main characters, Tokiko/Sumiko Kurishima, visits friends, very much looks forward to the mature work in its use of space:

Shot down a hall in a home, becomes LS as Tokiko and her friend walk down it. Match On Action 90-degree cut to a front-on camera [very typical of the mature Ozu] MLS as the woman kneels and Tokiko walks past her into the room. Match on action 180-degree cut to a MLS from the back of Tokiko as she walks in and begins to sit down at a table with two other women. Match on action cut slightly over 180-degrees to a MS three-quarter profile shot of Tokiko as she sits down. Cut over the axis of action to a MS three quarter profile two shot of the women talking to Tokiko [who appear to be looking in the same direction as her]

This editing style is, for the most part, fairly typical of *What*

Did The Lady Forget? and it is carried over more or less intact to the wartime films, which really begin to look like Ozu films in this respect (it would be four years until Ozu's next film, and in the ten years from 1938-1948 he produced only four films, compared to the thirty-seven he produced in his first decade as a director). As David Bordwell notes about *Brother and Sisters of the Toda Family* [1941]: "stylistically the film grows fairly directly out of *What Did the Lady Forget?*"¹⁸ and indeed the only feature that seems to be crystallized in this film, the one that puts the mature editing style firmly in place, is the way Ozu would cut dialogue scenes involving a group of people: at angles of 90 and 180-degrees with the camera directly in front of the characters.

After two more films, *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* [1947] and *A Hen In The Wind* [1948], in which, I think, his mature editing style is greatly to the fore, Ozu made the film in which his whole style can be seen as emerging in its entirety for the first time: *Late Spring* [1949]. The 360-degree editing from this film until his last doesn't really develop any more (which may be why Noel Burch¹⁹, who concentrates on Ozu's editing a great deal, sees the post 1949 films as rigid and academic). But, as stated earlier, the other main element of the Ozu style very much did develop.

The transition shots, which are perhaps the most famous and discussed feature of Ozu's style, are again apparent in his early work. They first appear, like the 360-degree shooting, in Ozu's 1930 crime films *Walk Cheerfully* and, especially, *That Night's Wife*, in which, though they are only sporadically used, they actually begin to work in the way Bordwell & Thompson suggest is the most common way they are used across Ozu's whole career: through a pattern of "dominants and overtones."²⁰ They mean by this simply that some elements in the shot are dominant in that shot whilst others are in the background, overtone, and these elements usually (but not always) become dominant later (and may or may not be narratively significant).

In *That Night's Wife*, there is a cut from a shot of the protagonist Hashizume's/Tokihiko Okada's, wife Mayumi/Emiko Yagumo, to a shot of a lamp, a shot of a plant, an exterior shot of a streetlight (dominant) and leaves (overtone) and finally a shot of a wall with the shadows of the leaves cast upon it (making the leaves the dominant), before finally the shot of the protagonist, who is hiding behind a wall. There are only a few transitions like this in *That Night's Wife*, but it is still more advanced in this area than any Ozu film would be for another three years.

The most common genre in Ozu's early 1930s work was the comedy, and in these films there are generally few or no transition shots at all. As I stated before, *I Flunked, But...* and *The Lady And The Beard* have none, and *I Was Born, But...*, which details the struggles of two young boys both with bullies and with their disgust at their father's lowly job, has but two, and both are simple one-shot transitions. One occurs after the boys (Hideo Sugawara and Kozo Tokkan) walk home with their father Yoshii/Tatsuo Satio after their first encounter with the bullies: they walk down the road, there is a cut to a low angle shot of a telegraph pole, then an inter-title which reads 'morning' (these act as sole transitions themselves later in the film) and then a shot of the

father in the garden. The other is a shot of a bag of wheat emptying before the film cuts to the two boys lounging about.

Again, as with the 360 degree shooting, the 1933 film *Woman Of Tokyo* proves quite important. The transitions in this film are still only one and two shots in duration (the mature films typically have an average of four), but there are ten or twelve clear instances of them throughout, and some striking dominant/overtone examples. The opening scene, for instance, has Ryoichi ask Chikako for a sock, whereupon there is a cut to a sock tree situated just outside the window, which here becomes dominant after being seen in the background as an overtone when the scene began. Also, just after Ryoichi has been told that Chikako is a suspected prostitute, he sits down, distraught, and a black kettle can be seen in the background as an overtone. There is then a cut to a transition shot of the kettle (now dominant) before the narration moves to Chikako.

A film made the following year, *Story Of Floating Weeds* [1934], proves to be the next important film in this area. It is only the second Ozu film to begin with "intermediate" shots (after *Dragnet Girl*, disproving Noel Burch's²¹ curious assertion that all Ozu's films start with them), and they are of an empty room, a grandfather clock (clocks become common subjects in these shots) and a train whistle blowing. Furthermore, and although transition shots are sporadic throughout, this film marks a step forward in that most of its transitional passages are three shots in length, where in the films before they largely consisted of two at most (with exceptions like the opening of *Dragnet Girl*, where there are seven).

Ozu's final film before WW2, *What Did The Lady Forget?*, takes transition shots a step further in that here they are of fewer and often repeated objects (*Woman Of Tokyo* actually looks forward to this, as many of its transitions are of only two kettles). The most prominent in this film are a shot of a building and a bare tree, a shot of a potted plant next to a door and a shot of an empty room. Also in this film the shots begin to be held longer, which is a feature of the mature style (anything up to seven or eight seconds in the post-war films, here generally five).

The very next film Ozu made, *Brothers And Sisters Of The Toda Family*, looks much more like a mature film in that some of its transitions contain four shots. The opening of the film, for example, is a shot of trees (overtone) and a wall, a shot of plants (foliage becoming dominant), an exterior shot of a house with some lights set up and then a shot of people setting chairs up outside (in another move towards the mature style, these people are intermittently cut back to as the first scene inside progresses, and only in the next scene is it revealed what is going on. They are getting ready for a family photo).

This film is also the first to use "intermediate spaces"²² in the middle of a scene. The main example is when one of the central characters is on the telephone and there are cut-aways to shots of another room and a clock, before the character on the phone is seen again.

The last film Ozu made before *Late Spring*, *Hen In The Wind*, is actually the film in which the mature style of tran-

sition shots emerges. This film can in fact be seen as both a summation and a crystallization of what had gone before, and a look forward to the next film.

For example, there are many sets of transition shots in the film. It opens with four: LS of people walking past buildings and a large cooling tank (overtone), shot of the tank (dominant), shot of some old buildings, shot down an alley outside the house of the main character, and these, particularly the cooling tank (which is continually presented from different angles), make up about 75% of the transitions in the whole film. There are in fact, and this is the last major feature of the mature usage of these shots left to arrive, transition shots after over half of the scenes in this film, which is as much as in any of the mature works.

A further way in which this film anticipates the mature films' use of transition shots is that many of them in *Hen In The Wind* are exterior shots, where most were interiors in the previous films. The transitions in the films after *Late Spring* tend largely to be of exteriors, and this works to create a specific kind of patterning, an alternating rhythm in the films, as most of their scenes take place in interiors (it also works to draw attention more obviously to off-screen space).

Where transition shots differ in Ozu's career from 360-degree shooting is in the fact that they developed further across the mature work. The main way in which they did this was by becoming more overtly attuned to the nuances of the thematics or narrational strategies of each particular film (though they are never openly metaphorical, as critics like Donald Richie²³, Paul Schrader²⁴, Kathe Geist²⁵ and Don Willis²⁶ suggest). Many of the transitions in *Tokyo Story*, for example, reinforce the central dichotomy of the film between Tokyo and Onomichi, which is between the old and the young, the archaic and the modern. They do this by showing the hills and the harbour and especially the Buddhist statues in the Onomichi scenes, while in Tokyo shots of chimneys and smoke and offices dominate (broadly: rural vs urban).

In terms of narration, the final colour films, particularly the lighter of them (*Late Autumn* [1960], *Ohayo* [1959] and *An Autumn Afternoon*), have shots that become more oblique and playful in introducing scenes. A prime example occurs after the first scene in *An Autumn Afternoon*, after one of the protagonist's friends has repeatedly declined a dinner invitation because he is going to a baseball game. From this the narration cuts to three successive shots of a baseball stadium's floodlights, then to an interior shot of a television (on which the baseball game is playing), then to four (unknown) men watching the TV at a bar (with the TV now as an overtone in the right of the frame), then to a shot down a corridor with the four men who were dominant in the previous shot now as overtones on the third plane of the frame, then finally to a shot of the protagonist and his two friends (one of whom is the man who was supposed to be at the baseball game).

Some of the other elements of the mature Ozu style have a somewhat more clear line of development throughout his career than the two previously discussed. The prime example is that of camera height and movement. In most of the



early 1930s films, particularly *Walk Cheerfully*, the camera is habitually at just below chest height (though long shots are generally taken from lower), and the crime/gangster films especially feature striking angles, such as the high angle shots of the policemen hunting the protagonist in *That Night's Wife* (which look forward to Lang's *M* [1931] the following year), or the very high angle, indeed almost overhead shot of people walking that opens *Dragnet Girl*. The 1932 comedy *Where Now Are The Dreams Of Youth?* makes fairly consistent use of a lower camera height, but it is the same year's *I Was Born, But...* that introduces the mature style camera height for the first time.

Though following films like *Woman Of Tokyo* and *Passing Fancy* [1933] adhere to the mature camera height when characters are seated, it is generally a little higher when

photographing characters standing, and this is more or less the pattern for the remaining films of the decade. Ozu's final pre-war film, *What Did The Lady Forget?* is the film in which the mature style camera height is firmly set in place, being almost always three feet from the ground, and this carries over directly to *Brothers And Sisters Of The Toda Family* and the rest of the films before *Late Spring*.

Camera movement is something Ozu continued to refine right up until 1958, when he switched to colour film production and eliminated it completely. The early 1930s films make constant [and actually rather idiosyncratic] use of the mobile camera. *Days Of Youth*, as David Bordwell²⁷ notes, features all manner of pans, tilts and tracking shots, and *Walk Cheerfully* features particularly complex and extended tracking shots. Ozu's use of a moving camera can

be seen at its most singular in *That Night's Wife*, and its use in that film actually prefigures the way Ozu will often move the camera in the mature films (though to a much lesser degree).

The general pattern for *That Night's Wife* is to have the mobile camera (generally lateral tracking shots) move around static characters and objects, like a long tracking shot along a row of stationary policemen, whilst moving characters, as when the protagonist is chased by the police, are filmed by a static, motionless camera. In this way the camera is overtly called attention to, and here Ozu was very much working against the classical paradigm that was otherwise largely informing his work.

This is also seen in the way this film, and most others until about 1934, actually open with a tracking shot past inanimate objects or stationary people, like the camera tracking diagonally up to the kettle in the first shot of *Woman Of Tokyo* or along a crowd of seated students in *I Flunked, But...* and *Where Now Are The Dreams Of Youth* (and in these the camera is already moving when the film opens on it). Also, in his early films, Ozu often cuts from one tracking shot before it finds its subject to another one mid track, sometimes two or three times.

Camera mobility begins to lessen throughout the 1930s, starting with *Woman Of Tokyo*, though these films generally do still feature more camera work than the mature films and it is still often self-reflexive. *What Did The Lady Forget?* has noticeably less mobile camerawork, as the mature editing style begins to really take shape, and this is further refined throughout the wartime films and through *Record Of A Tenement Gentleman* and particularly *Hen In The Wind*, which actually has less moving camera shots than many of the mature films.

The mobile camera then, until *Equinox Flower* in 1958, appears an average of three or perhaps four times per film (excluding shots where the camera is attached to a moving object like a train in *Late Spring* or tram in *Tokyo Story*). When the camera does move though, is it still often completely autonomous movement, as in *Early Summer* [which incidentally contains the only crane shot in any Ozu film] when the camera begins tracking down a hall after the characters have disappeared, or the lateral tracking shot past a wall and onto the completely stationary elderly couple in *Tokyo Story*.

The other way the camera tends to move in the mature films (and in some earlier films like *I Was Born, But...* and *Record Of A Tenement Gentleman*), is simply to follow characters as they walk, and in this it is generally behind them and still at the same low height. Many commentators, particularly Kathe Geist²⁸ and Audie Bock²⁹, have written of films in Ozu's late period with no camera movement at all, but this only occurs with the change to colour film production in 1958. All the films from *Late Spring* up to *Equinox Flower* have some (however little) mobile camerawork.

One should not infer from my work here that Ozu's style was crystallized with *Late Spring* and then simply remained rigidly constant across the ensuing thirteen years of his career. This is not the case. Although there is far less overt development after 1949 of the major facets of Ozu's cinematic

style, there is still a subtle series of variations and permutations that he works on them. This was (necessarily as well as in terms of subject and scope) beyond this particular piece of work.

I Was Born, But... and Ohayo

Although *Ohayo* is not as strict a remake of *I Was Born, But...* as *Floating Weeds* is of *Story Of Floating Weeds*, these two films make very interesting companion pieces, and showcase striking contrasts and similarities that draw attention to Ozu's styles early and late in his career. Both films centre on children's disillusionment with and disappointment in the adult world—In the former with the rigid and unchangeable hierarchical structure of the workplace, and in the latter with the (as Minoru and Isamu see it) pointless mores and manners of day-to-day life, incited by their father's refusal to buy them a TV set.

The most explicit difference between these films is that the former is a silent film in black and white and the latter is in sound and colour. Although Ozu was late in adapting to both these (by then) filmmaking norms (his first sound film was *The Only Son* in 1936), he used them particularly expressively and distinctively. And if I may be allowed a small digression, by way of a correction to all those (David A. Cook³⁰ in particular) who have taken Ozu's late conversions to sound and colour as an example of his conservatism; Mizoguchi didn't make a colour film until 1954 (only four years before *Floating Weeds*) and Kurosawa until 1970.

Furthermore, in relation to sound, Charlie Chaplin didn't make a film to feature spoken dialogue until 1940: and even if one takes *Modern Times* (which features only diegetic sound effects) to be his first sound film, that was still two years after *The Only Son* in 1938. My point is that technical conservatism has never been a charge levelled at these filmmakers; they are all great artists who adapted to these techniques when it suited and when they could best make use of them. I only ask that the same be said of Ozu.

To return to the point, the mise en scene in *I Was Born, But...*, as in all of Ozu's Shomin-Geki films, is rather naturalistic, with flat, even lighting and compositions in depth. These traits do carry over into the colour work, but Ozu used a special Agfacolour stock for these films that lent them a certain stylisation, a contrast between subtle muted colours like brown and beige and primary colours [most especially red], and this is to the fore throughout *Ohayo*: in the socks of the lady with the television set, the red on the ladder and the fire hose in the oft seen establishing shot outside the young boy's teacher's flat (which is otherwise very pale), in the various kettles and other appliances in the different homes in the film, and even in the opening credits, where several written characters appear in bright red as against the others in white and the beige burlap background.

Ozu also uses red to anchor spatial orientation, as in *Ohayo* when a bright red sign seen in an exterior shot outside some cafes is then seen through a window when the film moves inside. He also tends to use colour for its own sake, fore-grounded as space is in the mature style, by graphically matching it across cuts. This is most prominent

in *Equinox Flower* but can be seen in *Ohayo* in the cut from the aforementioned establishing shot outside the teacher Fukui's/Keiji Sata's flat where the red on the ladder on the left of the first plane of the frame is overt, to the shot inside where it is matched by a wall mount on the left beside the door (it is a 90-degree cut).

The sound and music in Ozu's films are things that have received extremely little attention from critics, but he generally used them quite distinctively. The most obvious example for sound would obviously be the trains and boats heard throughout *Tokyo Story*, but in *Ohayo* he plays with diegetic/non-diegetic sound for comic effect, with the young boy's and adult Mr. Okubo's/Toyo Takahash's constant farting being represented by differently pitched musical notes on stringed and brass instruments.

The music in Ozu's films, which is usually made up of a limited repertoire of often melancholic themes for strings which become associated with certain characters over the film, is in *Ohayo* (which is dominated for the most part by two motifs) much lighter, making use of other instrumentation like percussion and guitar on the main theme that is associated with the children (or, more precisely, childishness, as it is later heard when Mrs. Haraguchi's/Haruo Tanaka's mother/Eiko Miyoshi is being obstinate and rude and when Mr. Okubo is farting).

The (quite literally) incidental score, which is used in more or less the same way in all the mature films (not in any real sense to underline the emotion of the characters or the progress of the narrative: indeed Ozu's composer Kojun Saito recalls Ozu always asking for "Good weather music"³¹ no matter what), is initially heard over the transition shots and generally plays on into the following scene until that scene's main action begins. Later in the film the music becomes more frequent, such as when Mrs. Hayashi is snubbed by her neighbour and a prominent, tense brass motif suddenly (and comically) swells up on the soundtrack. The music also tends now to underscore entire scenes in the film.

In terms of Ozu's method of narration and narrative structure, there are fruitful parallels and differences to be drawn between these two films. Both centre on children at odds with adults, and both deal with what David Bordwell calls "the theme of the decline of paternal authority."³² Both also have concentrated narrative durations of only five or six days and closely compare and contrast the children and the adults (*I Was Born, But...* does this most overtly, as when a tracking shot in the father's office cuts to a tracking shot in the school, and then a few shots later a tracking shot in the opposite direction cuts to a track onto the two main children, who have skipped school), with the narration moving freely between them, putting, as it were, both sides of the story across. However, as is common with Ozu's later works, the structure of *Ohayo* is substantially more intricate than that of *I Was Born, But...*

The best term for the structure of *Ohayo* [and many mature films] would probably be overlapping: where a minor or completely irrelevant character in one scene is then followed (often before the first scene has reached any conclusion or point) to become central in the next—in a

sort of narrative play of dominants and overtones. There is a little of this in *I Was Born, But...*, such as the scene in the home that begins with the children and then moves to the parents, but generally that film is more conventionally put together, with fixed characters remaining the centre of scenes and the narration cutting to another scene only when the previous one has finished. Also there are few, if any, examples in *I Was Born, But...* of the beginning of scenes well before any character or action becomes its focus and the holding of them well after a character has left or an action has finished, which is another staple of the mature work.

In *Ohayo*, the majority of scenes flow in the overlapping way. One scene early on has all the neighbourhood boys at the house of the only couple with a TV. The boys call over to the two main children, Minoru/Koji Shigaraki and Isamu/Masahiko Shimazu, and the film then cuts to them preparing to go out themselves. They then tell their mother they are going off to study and leave, but the film stays with the mum as one of the neighbours calls round and they begin chatting. A few scenes later, after another woman has caught the boys watching TV and ordered them out, Minoru and Isamu leave and bump into their mum. The film again then stays with her and follows her to where she is going.

Finally, it is worth highlighting passages from either film to demonstrate the editing and cinematographic similarities and differences, and show how, with particular regard to 360-degree editing and camera height, Ozu's mature style had its roots very much in his earlier work. Also of note in this are the features that had vanished from Ozu's films by the time of *Ohayo*, such as P.O.V. cutting and mobile camerawork. The following occurs early in *I Was Born, But...*

LS low height tracking shot of the two main boys and their dad walking. The camera is just in front of them and tracking to the left. ELS with moving camera of some other boys from the dad's P.O.V., camera now moving to the right. Low height MS tracking shot going to the left of the dad walking. 180-degree cut to a MS tracking shot of the kids, camera going right. 180-degree cut to the same shot of the dad as before. Intertitle LS tracking shot of the three of them from a low height behind them and 45-degrees from last set-up. Transition shot of a telegraph pole. Intertitle—"next morning". Low height MS of dad in the garden.

This was the first Ozu film to make extended use of 180-degree cuts, though there is as much 180-degree rule 45-degree cutting in the film. Also, much of *I Was Born, But...* takes place in exteriors, and *Ohayo*, being a mature Ozu film, takes place largely in interiors. The following is typical of Ozu's editing from *Late Spring* on, containing cuts of only 90 and 180-degrees with the camera only three feet from the floor:

Transition shot: ELS of building. Transition shot: Closer shot of building. Transition/establishing shot down corridor. A woman walks to a door and goes in. Match on

action 90-degree cut as the woman, who is Fukui's Sister comes into the flat in LS with two boys also in shot. Cut to an adjacent room as the woman, again in LS, enters and walks towards the camera. Cut 90-degrees again to reveal Fukui sitting frame right and a boy extreme frame left [a very typical centrifugal composition]. Cut 90-degrees again to a front on MS of Fukui as he looks over his shoulder and begins to turn round. Match on action cut 180-degrees round as Fukui turns and sits with two boys who are working [one is Minoru]. 180-degree cut to a front on MCU shot of the boy whose back was previously to the camera. Cut another 180-degrees to a front on MCU shot of Fukui [graphic match cut, also very common in the later films]. Cut again another 180-degrees to a shot of the three of them taken from the other side, so that now Fukui is facing away from the camera.

In many ways such a comparison as the one above is slightly misleading in that it supposes a rather too neat teleology across Ozu's career; and such a tidy sense of development cannot be imposed onto his work. I simply wanted to hint at the fact that many late Ozu stylistic features have a clear progenitor in some very early films—in the same way that the view of *Tokyo Story* as a simple reworking of McCarey's *Make Way For Tomorrow* (which it admittedly has much in common with) can be overturned by a viewing of *The Only Son*, which seems to me to bear the kind of relationship to *Tokyo Story* that *I Was Born, But...* does to *Ohayo*.

What has long surprised me about this director, so often seen (more than most, in fact) to have perpetually, studiously reworked the same very limited number of themes, subjects and situations over and over, is that there is not one film that satisfactorily sums up or represents his cinema (by which I mean rather more than his style). *Tokyo Story* would, I think, be the predictable candidate of most: for the fact that it is still his most famous work as much as anything else, and is also now a mainstay in the poll by *Sight and Sound* of the greatest films of all time.

However, looked at even cursorily in the context of Ozu's oeuvre, *Tokyo Story's* focus on the extended family is more singular than recurrent (the extended family is far more prominent in the work of the Ozu-influenced Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien). And, similarly, its extremely far-reaching scope, its breadth and searing analysis of what Robin Wood has termed "a society at a certain phase of its evolution"³³ must discount it as the archetypal Ozu film, in any way typical of his cinema, as such notions, indeed critiques, are generally far more implicit in his work, if indeed they can be detected to that level at all, which is at least arguable.

The lack of any one film that can be taken to be representative of Ozu's work can be taken as symptomatic of what a complex artist he was. It has been a contention of David Bordwell that Ozu's stories (and from this must we not conclude his themes) are banal. Indeed, in his very recent essay on *Tokyo Story* that accompanies Criterion's DVD release of the film, he somewhat incredibly refers to its story as mundane. This, I would strongly argue, is not the case. There are simply *no* mundane or banal stories: no such

thing. There are only mundane or banal *treatments* of stories (or themes), and here Ozu could surely never be found wanting. In his opening up of the universal through the specific, his complex assessment of life in a particular society at a particular time that nevertheless continues to have currency and resonance, Ozu is as important to us now as he ever has been. His cinema is, as Akira Iwasaki has called it, "eternal."³⁴

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Notes Toward a Reading of *Tokyo Twilight* (*Tokyo boshoku*)

BY ROBIN WOOD

On February 27th I was at last able to see Ozu's *Tokyo Twilight* for the first time. I am writing this on the 29th, to be in time for this issue's deadline: something I almost never do, especially for films of obviously high value, preferring to allow for time, reflection, discussion and (when possible) repeated viewings to deepen perception and correct misreadings. In this case there is little time and no chance of a repeated viewing: the film's solitary screening was part of the travelling Ozu retrospective, just drawing to its close at the Toronto Cinematheque. I have long thought of the film as 'the one nobody wants to talk about': it has received nothing like the attention of certain films that preceded it (e.g. *Late Spring*, *Tokyo Story*) or the late colour films that followed it. And I was intrigued by the idea of an Ozu film that dealt with issues such as premarital sex, abortion and suicide.

Its juxtaposition with *Equinox Flower* (made one year later, 1958) is startling: not only Ozu's last film in black-and-white next to his first in colour, but also his bleakest (it reminded Richard Lippe of Ingmar Bergman) next to one of his mel-

lowest and most life-affirming. The opposition is not only general (subject-matter, characterization...) but signalled in tiny details. Two motifs (authorial signatures)—trains, and laundry hung up to dry—occur through most of Ozu's work, the former in (I think) every film from *Story of Floating Weeds* on, the latter in many of the silent films as well. The trains represent the possibility of movement and change, arrival and departure, the laundry notions of cleansing and starting afresh. *Tokyo Twilight* is among the very rare Ozu films in which laundry does not appear; in *Equinox Flower* the image is reserved for the triumphant ending, with brilliantly coloured laundry on lines, celebrating the triumph of the conspiracy of women over the patriarch. Trains, on the other hand, are insisted upon throughout *Tokyo Twilight*, but always with overtones of melancholy or tragedy (Akiko's suicide, departure of the mother). The juxtaposition of the two films confirms once again one of Ozu's most important characteristics as artist and human being: his remarkable openness to the complexities, contradictions and potentialities of



Tokyo Twilight: the delinquent mother and her partner.

human life—the more remarkable, perhaps, for an artist who is widely known for the apparently limited range of his subject-matter (though the retrospective has shown this to apply only to the ‘late’, postwar period, and even there is more apparent than real).

Writing, then, in haste, I want to examine briefly a number of aspects of the film, and it seems convenient and in the interests of clarity to number them. They are not in any order of importance but they are at least partly sequential.

1. The Ozu ‘System’. So much has been written about Ozu’s highly idiosyncratic stylistics that it might appear redundant to raise the matter yet again. I shall, however, take for granted that readers are fully aware of their nature. (I prefer the word ‘system’ here to ‘style’: both terms, if they have any authenticity, derive directly from the artist and ‘express’ him or her, but ‘style’ often has overtones of something deliberately cultivated and applied externally, whereas a ‘system’, going beyond ‘style’ to include subject matter, is, essentially, the ‘person’—one might say, the *diagram* of the person). The aspect of Ozu’s system that needs to be stressed here is its openness, its non-judgemental quality—more specifically, his refusal to use cinematic means to tell his audience how they should judge the characters: camera angle (high, low, tilt shots), lighting (bright, dark...), camera distance. All his characters are filmed, essentially, *in the same way*, and the lighting is that of the specific environment. We are left to judge them from what they say, what they do, their expressions, their behaviour, their motivation, their positions, the effects of their behaviour. Few filmmakers have given their audience such freedom. This seems especially important in *Tokyo Twilight* because its sympathies are so unconventional. Here, *all* the characters are flawed, imperfect, in one way or another, but the two (it seems to me) for whom we are encouraged to feel the most sympathy and compassion are, precisely, the most transgressive: the delinquent mother, the delinquent younger daughter: the two who break the rules, causing the pain of others and, ultimately, their own. Neither is condemned for this.

2. The Environment. I have never been to Japan, but have come to realize the immense importance of *location* in Ozu’s films. It’s obvious enough in those that clearly differentiate between different locales (Tokyo, Kyoto, for example, in *Late Spring* and *The Makioka Sisters*), but there is clearly significance in the use even of subsections of Tokyo. The Tokyo of *Tokyo Twilight* is clearly signified by the smog masks certain of the characters wear when they go out into the city: a locus of contamination. At the same time a distinction seems to be made: those who put on their masks and those who don’t (Takako/Setsuko Hara does; Akiko/Ineko Arima, her younger sister, doesn’t): those who do, perhaps, are those who feel they can rise above ordinary human problems, remaining ‘clean’.

Otherwise, the environment is characterized predominantly by somewhat sleazy bars, gambling places, piped music, dark or dingy streets.

3. The Characters. Without accusing Ozu of a simplistic determinism (you live in one place, you’re good,

another, you’re bad), one can see a very close connection between the environment of *Tokyo Twilight* and its characters’ lives and decisions. No one in the film is ‘pure’, all are, one might say, in different ways contaminated, like the city. What is especially remarkable here (given their appearances in other Ozu films) is the use made of Chishu Ryu and Setsuko Hara. The former (almost seeming, at times, the director’s *alter ego* or spokesman, though not quite in the direct way in which Max von Sydow seemed it in certain Bergman films—*The Seventh Seal* most obviously) is here drained, withdrawn, reduced to ineffectuality, vaguely aware of the dramas going on around him but too hurt to take a positive role. Even more startling is the use of Hara, the radiant, energetic young woman of what I have elsewhere called the ‘Noriko’ trilogy. Here she becomes the film’s least sympathetic character (though none of the characters is entirely beyond Ozu’s wise and cautious sympathy). Her role as a wife and mother, escaping an apparently abusive relationship with her husband, seems yet another nail in the coffin of the hoary old cliché of Hara as ‘the eternal virgin’. She has clearly been deeply hurt—perhaps permanently affected—by her mother’s desertion, and has assumed (as a result) a moralistic stance that is as alienating as her father’s withdrawal. Akiko tries to talk to her (as she also tries to talk to their father), but it is impossible, the moral barricade is impregnable. The film makes it clear that Akiko’s suicide might (would?) have been prevented if she had felt able to talk to either sister or father. Both are therefore implicated in the film’s catastrophe, Akiko’s desolate and desperate suicide.

The film’s sense of alternative (but very tentative) possibilities seems centred in the notion of possible forgiveness and reconciliation, which Takako/Hara repudiates. The climactic sequence in which the mother, refused recognition, departs on the train while constantly looking out of the window in the hope that her daughter may be coming to say goodbye, is quite heartbreaking (she has been, and continues to be, drinking to drown the pain). It also seriously qualifies Takako’s decision to return to her husband for her child’s sake (a child in whom we have seen her take remarkably little interest, even its grandfather, in one of Sugiyama/Ryu’s mellower moments, seen briefly playing with it). The husband, after all, from what we have gathered of the relationship, has been abusive, so the woman’s return has overtones of masochism, or, at best, a kind of stoical resignation, which scarcely bodes well for the future.

4. These late Ozu films are detailed and highly intelligent critical studies in cultural change which ultimately defy the application of such terms as ‘progressive’, ‘regressive’, ‘conservative’, etc.... ‘Change’ is not necessarily for the better (though our current culture is constantly telling us that of course it *is* (‘the latest’, the ‘with it’)—an obvious ploy of corporate capitalism, which depends upon the mystification for selling its products. If we gain new freedoms, we should also beware of casually casting off the past without asking ourselves what in it—what standards of seriousness, what beliefs, what aspects of our lives—might be worth preserving. I find all these thoughts in Ozu, incomparably expressed.

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Los Angeles Plays Itself

BY RICHARD LIPPE

In 2003 a number of intelligent, provocative and creative documentaries, *Capturing the Friedmans*, *The Weather Underground* and *The Fog of War*, were released and Thom Andersen's *Los Angeles Plays Itself* needs to be added to the list. The film, which is produced, written and directed by Andersen, is a 169 minute (with an intermission) video essay about both Los Angeles and its depiction on film. Andersen, a faculty member in the School of Film/Video at the California Institute of the Arts, has lived in Los Angeles since 1947 and calls the city his hometown. It is from the perspective of a native resident that Andersen views the city and mounts his critique of how Los Angeles has been used and depicted on film, particularly in the Hollywood cinema. *Los Angeles Plays Itself* is divided into three sections, "The City as Background", "The City as Character" and "The City as Subject". Each of these sections, which are primarily composed of clips from feature films, develops a critical look at the way in which the film industry has used the city.

In "The City as Background", Andersen's concern is how local buildings and locations have been appropriated to serve filmmakers needs. For instance, he illustrates the various cinematic

transformations the exterior and/or interior of the Bradbury Building, an architectural landmark built in 1893, has undergone from its initial appearance in *China Girl* (1942) to *Wolf* (1994). Andersen's most elaborate discussion of the building is devoted to Ridley Scott's radical reworking of its interior for *Blade Runner's* (1982) futuristic vision of a 2019 Los Angeles. In effect, Andersen, with this fascinating footage, shows how the Bradbury Building can be seen as being similar to a permanent studio set piece which is again and again redressed to suit the specific requirements of a current film project.

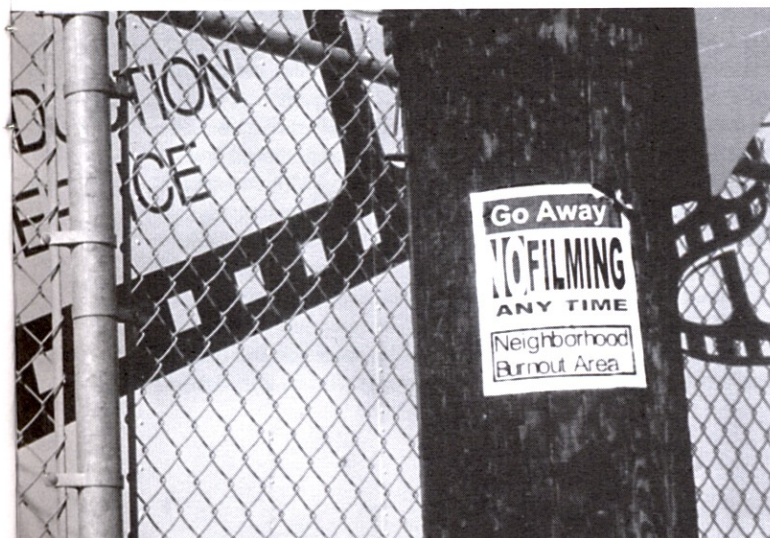
Andersen's most caustic comments on the studios' and Los Angeles architecture are saved for their usage of the modernist houses that were built in the 1920s and 1930s. He points out that these buildings, such as Richard Neutra's Lovell House, are testaments to the politically and aesthetically progressive residents of the city who commissioned these houses. For Andersen, it becomes grimly ironic that Hollywood filmmakers, instead of celebrating these beautiful and culturally valuable works, use them in contexts that carry reactionary connotations. In Los Angeles-set films, a modernist house is invariably associated with decadence and corruption - it is the living space of the film's villain and is intended to be read as a reflection of his immoral (that is, unnatural) appetites. As with the Bradbury Building, the mainstream film industry shows no interest in the historical

significance of these buildings; but even more tellingly, when dealing with modernism, the industry reveals its inability to appreciate neither a genuine art work nor the intelligence and creativity of the people who were responsible for producing these buildings.

Andersen also calls attention to the fact that many Hollywood films completely misrepresent the geography of the city, staging scenes so that they appear to have a coherent spacial and temporal relationship when, in actual fact, these locations are miles apart and wreck havoc with the city's landscape. He cites *Cobra* (1993) as one of the worst offenders in its distortion of the city's layout; alternatively, Andersen praises the original version of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) because it contains car chases that preserve the geographical space in which the action takes place. While these topographical concerns are obviously a non-issue for the viewer who has never been to Los Angeles or doesn't know the city well, Andersen is reinforcing his basic point that the film industry is indifferent to how it depicts the city. Still, he concludes "The City as Background" section on something of a grace note, saying that Hollywood doesn't have ill will towards the city itself, it is just that Los Angeles is the most convenient on-location shooting space available to the industry.

In the film's second section, "The City as Character", Andersen has two major concerns: a) film noir and Los Angeles

Los Angeles and the film industry.





and b) individual directors' attitudes toward the city. *Los Angeles Plays Itself* begins with an on-location nighttime street scene from Sam Fuller's noir influenced *The Crimson Kimono* (1959) and follows it with the opening cityscape shot of Richard Quine's *Pushover* (1954). Discussing Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), Andersen claims the film established in the minds of moviegoers both that Los Angeles was "...the capital of adultery and murder and the notion that evil is banal." Although he refers to Wilder and Raymond Chandler in primarily derogatory terms, Andersen grudgingly acknowledges their modernist sensibilities. He also devotes footage to Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), expressing an admiration for the director's respect of the geography of the city in his staging of the action. The film also prompts Andersen to comment on the nature of the medium itself, pointing out that many of the buildings seen in this film no longer exist, making *Kiss Me Deadly*, among other things, a visual record of the city's past.

Andersen's remarks on *Double Indemnity* and Wilder, a European emigre, set the stage for his discussion on filmmakers and their responses to Los Angeles. He divides these directors into two groups, "low" and "high" tourists. Alfred Hitchcock is a "low" tourist as he showed no interest in the city and southern California, preferring the more picturesque landscapes of the northern part of the state. Another "low" tourist is New Yorker Woody Allen who, with *Annie Hall* (1977), sets up a New York City-Los Angeles opposition in which the latter is depicted as a ridiculous place. Andersen also says that people who hate Los Angeles love John Boorman's *Point Blank* (1967), a film that through both its

exterior and interior footage, makes the city appear "insidious" and "grotesque". In contrast, his "high" tourist list includes such European directors as Michelangelo Antonioni (*Zabriskie Point*, 1971) and Jacques Demy (*Model Shop*, 1969). Demy's film, which is one of his finest and most neglected works, deserves the praise Andersen gives it although his interest in the film is centered mainly on the director having Gary Lockwood, who plays a young architect about to be drafted and sent to Vietnam, say "It's a fabulous city. To think some people claim it's an ugly city when it's really pure poetry, it just kills me." The Lockwood character, realizing that he may never see his hometown again, gains a fresh vision of Los Angeles; in real life, Demy uses the character to voice his initial impression of the city's beauty which includes, as Andersen points out, sectors of it which he himself wouldn't have appreciated in the late 1960s.

Other "high" tourists are Andy Warhol and Fred Halsted, the director of the gay film classic *L.A. Plays Itself* (1972). In titling his film *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, Andersen is paying homage to Halsted's film (he calls it a "masterpiece"); and, in a way, the two works are similarly shaped. *L.A. Plays Itself* is in equal measure gay porn and commentary on California-Los Angeles. The film is structured on a division between the rural and the urban with 'loving' sex in the former and 'exploitative' sex in the latter. In Andersen's reworking of the premise, the 'rural' becomes Los Angeles and the 'urban' becomes Hollywood.

"The City as Character" section concludes with the work of another European director, Roman Polanski, with his film *Chinatown* (1974) setting the stage for *Los Angeles Plays Itself*'s final act,

"The City as Subject". Andersen's contention is that Los Angeles itself didn't become the subject of mainstream film until after the 1965 Watts riots which made the public aware that the city was not just 'Hollywood', the film capital of the world. It is also with the riots that the city begins to be seen as having a political history. Andersen claims that *Chinatown* marks the point at which the film industry realizes that Los Angeles's historical past can be turned into the subject of a narrative film. His concern with the film is in part that Hollywood's version of Los Angeles's 1930s water crisis is essentially a distortion of the facts. He introduces documentary materials as evidence to trace the actual events involved and shows that what the film presents is in significant part a fictionalization. Andersen feels that Hollywood not only misled the movie-going public, encouraging them to accept the film's account as the truth, but, more importantly, *Chinatown*, in its resolution in which the Jack Nicholson character is told "Forget it, Jake, it's Chinatown" is an instance of contemporary Hollywood's defeatist politics. Instead of providing the public with an accurate account of what happened, the film functions to validate the notion that individuals are helpless when it comes to dealing with social-political concerns in their actual life. Andersen says that what is accurate about *Chinatown*'s depiction of the city is how difficult it is to get around Los Angeles without a car which is what Jake Gittes experiences when his car is wrecked. He also argues that more recent films that use the historical Los Angeles as subject, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) and *L.A. Confidential* (1997), equally distort the truth and promote a defeatist attitude toward social activism. *L.A. Confidential* was, according to Andersen's press-kit notes, the film that led him to begin thinking about how Hollywood and the independent cinema have used and portrayed Los Angeles. It was *L.A. Confidential*'s distortions of facts pertaining to the underworld mob and police corruption in the 1950s that gave Andersen initially the idea of doing a lecture presentation (which led eventually to the making of *Los Angeles Plays Itself*) on the cinema's depiction of his hometown.

In dealing with *Chinatown* and fact vs. fiction, *Los Angeles Plays Itself* introduces

documentary material not simply to counter the fabrications of the film but to put forth the director's thoughts on the city's history and how it is written. Andersen says *Chinatown's* history is "written by the victors" who practice cynicism which he calls "the dominant myth of our time." He proposes instead a "public" history which he sees as the "real history"; this history is found in the press accounts and/or records from the period in which the events actually occurred. Andersen argues that *L.A. Confidential*, like *Chinatown*, plays with the notion that the film reveals a "secret" history of the city, the *real* story, when, in fact, this isn't what it delivers. For Andersen, *L.A. Confidential's* main interest is that the film deals with the LAPD. He offers an extended discussion of the city's police force, demonstrating how the LAPD's arrogant and authoritarian behaviour, which is used to instill fear into *both* the criminal and the ordinary citizen, was personified initially in the entertainment media by Sgt. Joe Friday in the hugely successful *Dragnet* radio and television series.

In *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, *L.A. Confidential* is one more Hollywood film that misrepresents the city. To get a more accurate portrait of Los Angeles as subject, Andersen points to what he refers to as the "neo-realist" films produced by non-Hollywood, independent-based filmmakers. An early example of these films is Kent MacKenzie's low budget *The Exiles* (1958) which deals with the lives of Hispanics living in the Bunker Hill area of the city. *Los Angeles Plays Itself* devotes its concluding section to footage from the work of MacKenzie and other "neo-realist" filmmakers including Haile Gerima (*Bush Mama*, 1975), Charles Burnett (*Killer of Sheep*, 1977) and Billy Woodberry (*Bless Their Little Hearts*, 1984). These filmmakers have attempted to portray the city from the perspective of ordinary people who live 'average' lives, and who struggle to survive in a city which tends to be indifferent and even hostile to those who aren't empowered through wealth and fame. Andersen's final section of the film reinforces the notion that Los Angeles today is dominated, as it was in the past, by the presence of Hollywood and the illusions it promotes. The city, which Andersen loves and sees as having the potential to offer much more to its citizens, remains captive of Hollywood and the fantasies it creates and celebrates.

Los Angeles Plays Itself is a highly personal and opinionated documentary with Andersen, for instance, telling the viewer that he really dislikes Los Angeles being called L.A., feeling that the abbreviation is derogatory. The film's narrator, Encke King, strikes an appropriate balance between engagement and distance in giving voice to Andersen's text; and, the film owes a great deal to editor Yoo Seung-Hyun. She and Andersen must have worked in very close collaboration to visualize and give coherence to such an extraordinarily ambitious project. Robert Koehler, in his *Variety* review, suggests the film ranks with the "great essay works of Jean-Luc Godard and Chris Marker." (Interestingly, in his press kit notes, Andersen wishes that "...someday somebody will make an ode upon Los Angeles like Jonas Mekas's great ode to New York and its seasons *As I Was Moving Ahead, Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*).

Koehler's high praise of *Los Angeles Plays Itself* is justified but the film doesn't have the delicacy and poetry that Godard and Marker are capable of producing in their best works. As conceived, Andersen's project is perhaps a bit too didactic in its divisions between Hollywood/Los Angeles, mainstream/ independent film, fiction/documentary, conservative/ progress, irresponsible/ responsible. As *Los Angeles Plays Itself* moves into its concluding section and fully articulates its agenda concerning film and reality, the film tends to become rather flat. Arguably, this isn't because the material becomes less interesting or what is being said and shown lacks conviction as Andersen is a commanding presence as a film historian and critic; instead, it is that Andersen's premise is somewhat too simplistic. While he makes a strong case for his anti-Hollywood position when it comes to the mainstream industry's depiction of Los Angeles, the scope of his critical undertaking is a bit narrow. For instance, in discussing *Chinatown*, Andersen doesn't address either that it is a *noir* film or the historical context in which the film was made, the time of Vietnam, Nixon and the increasing concerns about the government's credibility. *Los Angeles Plays Itself* contains numerous references to *noir* films, but Andersen ignores the fact that many *noirs*, in their critical portrayal of America as a patriarchal-capitalist society, carry progressive connotations. Also, it isn't

necessarily a given that *Chinatown's* final line of dialogue "Forget it, Jake, it's *Chinatown*" will be taken by the viewer as an inducement to be inactive in social-political life. In Andersen's readings of Hollywood films about Los Angeles, the overriding implication seems to be that just about everything produced within the mainstream cinema is dishonest and reactionary. This position needs a more developed argument than he provides.

In *Los Angeles Plays Itself* Andersen is both a film critic and a Los Angeles native who wants to argue that his hometown has been appropriated by the Hollywood film industry. His two functions sit a bit uneasily and at times it becomes difficult to know which Andersen is speaking.

In his press kit notes, Andersen says, in accounting for his thinking on the film medium, "The unacknowledged sources are the film writings of Hugo Munsterberg and Gilles Deleuze." In regard to the latter, he claims that he included a scene from Jerry Lewis's *The Disorderly Orderly* (1964) as a homage to Deleuze who, Andersen points out, explains "why Jerry Lewis matters." Judging from his comments, *The Disorderly Orderly* is more relevant to Andersen-the-film-critic than to the film's discussion of how Los Angeles is depicted in the mainstream cinema. In fact, the scene from *The Disorderly Orderly* doesn't appear to have a significant relationship to how Lewis either uses or interprets the city.

Los Angeles Plays Itself is unlike any other documentary on film and filmmaking. As a film about Los Angeles, it becomes also in great part a film about Hollywood, its history and its product; and, as such, the film functions to illustrate that Andersen, however much he disapproves of the Hollywood film industry and its output, has devoted a great deal of time and energy to the study of mainstream film. Andersen's insights about the films he discusses are never less than thought provoking and *Los Angeles Plays Itself* is consistently inventive, informative and entertaining. After watching the film, it is difficult not to be more attentive to how filmmakers use Los Angeles and the image and values they impart to the city. Additionally, it functions to make the viewer think about how other major cities have been presented on film.

Los Angeles Plays Itself is required viewing for anyone who professes to be a serious film lover.

Notes on The Toronto Film Festival

BY ROBIN WOOD

The organizing principle of the Toronto Film Festival is the opposite of that of its New York counterpart. The New York festival is so selective that a number of important films are eliminated (and one might well question some of the inclusions and exclusions); the Toronto organizers work on the principle that every film that anyone might consider worthy must be screened. Both systems have their merits and their drawbacks. Here in Toronto, confronted with the dubious guidance of a programme guide committed to championing, and justifying the inclusion of, every film as a work that deserves to be seen, how does the poor bewildered critic cope? Choices have to be made, but on what basis, given that many of the films and their directors are unknown quantities? I know people who go to four, even five, films a day; I lack both their stamina and their apparent capacity to absorb, and limit myself to two, if possible with a lengthy break in between. But on what grounds am I to make my choices? I begin, obviously, by eliminating as far as possible films by established artists which I am confident will open locally or at least

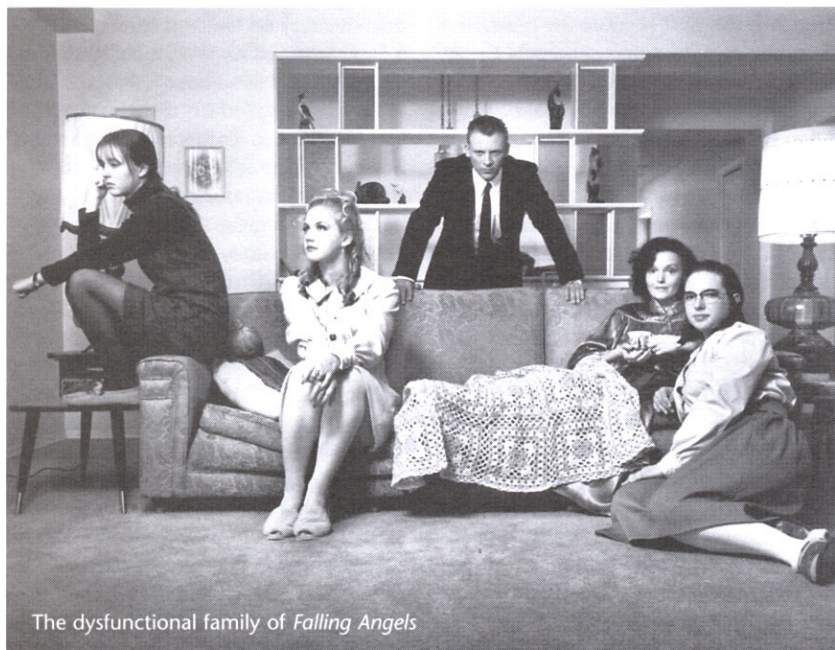
receive a release on DVD. But even this is hazardous: those, for example, who missed Claire Denis' *Trouble Every Day* a couple of years ago will still not have been able to see it unless they have the means to import a DVD copy from Europe which will only play on multi-region machines. I am not of course complaining about this situation: I love the generosity of impulse that wishes to include everything. I am simply indicating the problems involved for the viewer.

The notion of a festival report poses further problems for me. I seldom write about a film before I have seen it at least three times and there has been sufficient time lapse for my sense of its value and significance to have formed. In short, I am a critic, not a reviewer, a distinction that, within our 'fast food' culture of the instantly disposable, seems to be becoming increasingly blurred to the point where the terms are used interchangeably, a disaster for which academic film study over the last three decades must be held largely responsible. Its insistence upon theory, theory and more theory has been consistently at the expense of questions of value and 'the common pursuit of true judgement'—the ultimate human questions of 'What do we live for? What *should* we live for? What *might* we live for?', and, with these ultimate questions always in mind, the urgent question of our relation to the cultural situation within which we exist—the questions that criticism (as opposed

to 'reviewing') is ultimately (though often implicitly) about. All I can offer here, therefore, is a somewhat perfunctory and provisional overview of some of the films I saw. Despite my basic principle of choice I couldn't resist attending the screenings of the new films by Tsai and Haneke, though I prefer to wait and write about them at length when I have been able to resee them. And I am copping out for the time being on Bruno Dumont's new film, *29 Palms*. I disliked it for its apparent reduction of the complexities of human sexuality to a mindless, loveless animalism, but *perhaps* that is its point and *perhaps* its final minutes relate significantly to this. I just don't know, and am reluctant to discuss it until I can familiarize myself with it, the maker of *L'Humanité* having surely earned the benefit of any doubt.

Of the twenty or so films I saw, my favourite is *Mille Mois*, by the young Moroccan writer/director Faouzi Bensaidi, surely among the most remarkable feature film debuts in film history. Almost no one I spoke to saw it, and it has apparently not been picked up by a distributor, so, unless it appears on DVD, we shall have to wait until Bensaidi's subsequent films build his reputation and induce someone to 'discover' it. What first struck me about the film (a French/Moroccan/Belgian co-production—the filmmaker studied in France) is its extraordinary technical/aesthetic assurance: Bensaidi has an already fully developed and mature command of the possibilities of the CinemaScope image, and the film is full of breathtakingly complex and beautiful compositions. But this is as far removed as possible from 'Art for Art's sake', the film being as thematically dense as it is fascinating to watch. Its complex thematic/narrative structure will doubtless reveal more aspects on repeated viewings, but its central unifying concern appears to be the analysis and critique of power structures, developed around the central metaphor of the schoolmaster's heavy chair which a young boy (the pivotal character) is designated to carry wherever he goes. The narrative, involving several interconnected plot-lines and numerous characters, is masterfully controlled and developed. I felt in the presence of a mature artist who *thinks* cinematically.

Another French/Moroccan co-production (and again a first feature), *Les*



The dysfunctional family of *Falling Angels*

Yeux Secs, is also very striking, both in its subject-matter and its realization. It also, ominously, seems not to have a North American distributor. These two films certainly deserve to be seen just as much as the widely accessible Iranian films of Kiarostami, Panahi and the Makhmalbaf family. The film's premise (I'm not clear whether it is fact or fiction) is extreme, but no more so than the much-publicized horrors of women's lives in Afghanistan under the Taliban: the setting is a remote mountain village populated solely by women, visited once a year by herdsman, for sexual satisfaction and the procreation of more females for the next generation. One woman, Hala, attempts to start a revolution by urging the women to abandon all female offspring, ending the oppression at horrific expense. The use of spectacular natural settings is countered by the film's strikingly stylized use of colour and pattern. Kay Armitage describes this so vividly in the programme guide that I cannot do better than quote her:

"...Women dressed in vibrant colours stand in formal tableaux against the golden summer light and the children roam through fields of poppies in radiant scarlet. The striking symbol of the girls' destiny is a garden of poles fluttering with the red cloths of deflowered virgins. Only the central character, the fiery Hala, is dressed head-to toe in black as an ironic marker of movement and emotion."

Another major revelation was the mini-retrospect of Turkish films by Zeki Demirkubuz and Nuri Bilge Ceylan. I was already partly familiar with the former's work because I am allegedly 'supervising' the thesis on it of a Turkish graduate student who supplies me with the relevant videos—'allegedly', because she has no need of supervision and is far more familiar with the films than I am (besides having direct access to the culture). Consequently I did not watch the Demirkubus films in the festival (they are of great interest). Of the two Ceylan films I saw I marginally preferred the earlier, *Clouds of May*, perhaps because of its evident debt to what we now think of as early Kiarostami, the 'Koker' trilogy: it relates to *Where is the Friend's Home?* (the sensitive and complex treatment of childhood), and to *...And Life Goes On*, and *Through the Olive Trees* (the self-reflexive foregrounding of filmmaking, the filmmaker returning to make a film about the film he made), though it never becomes parasitic upon either, having very



much its own tone, delicacy and sensibility. Most viewers seem to have preferred *Distant* (about to receive a short run in Toronto's Cinematheque), a far darker and very different film which evoked for me Antonioni and Fassbinder in its study of alienation at once distinctively modern urban and intricately personalized within a detailed relationship. Juxtaposed with the films of Demirkubus, Ceylan's films suggest a thriving and complex Turkish film industry.

The notorious Cannes premiere of *The Brown Bunny* is proving hard for the film to live down, and proving also the dangers of screening a film before its editing is completed. The definitive version screened in Toronto (re-edited, half-an-hour shorter) seems to me less than a masterpiece but certainly deserving of respectful attention. As an actor Vincent Gallo has revealed a potent and distinctive screen presence (in his own *Buffalo 66*, and in Claire Denis' *Nenette et Boni* and, especially, her remarkable and disturbing *Trouble Every Day*, of which we still await a DVD release in North America). Here, he impressively carries the whole film, present in virtually every shot except those from his POV: one might say that his troubled and alienated character represents both the film's strength and its limitations. (See Dion Tubrett's contribution for a more thorough analysis).

Three Canadian films. Vincenzo

Natali's *Cube* attracted a lot of attention a few years ago, less in Canada than in Europe, especially France. It seemed to me accomplished and interesting, but more on the conceptual level than on that of realization. Natali had two films in the 2003 festival, of which I watched the first half hour of the one with what proved the perfectly appropriate title: *Nothing*. I would suggest to Natali that he return to college and enrol in *Comedy 101*, when he will be instructed in the first session that the worst thing you can do in a comedy is keep telling the audience how much they should be laughing. I joined the general exodus, and wonder now whether anyone was still there at the end. I understand that much the same thing occurred at the screening of Natali's other movie. This may sound very much like 'hitting a man when he's down', which is not something I like to be associated with. I think Natali would benefit from watching many other films, not in order to imitate them, but simply in order to experience what viewing a good film can be, the mental give-and-take that goes on between author and spectator as image follows image. Most university film departments today seem to be divided between 'theory' and 'film making', with little intercourse between the two and a minimum of actual film viewing. This seems to me worse than ridiculous. Every potential filmmaker should be steeped in

the cinema of the past and the present, as the primary educational experience (think Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol, Rivette, Rohmer...), with intensive analysis and in-depth criticism to back it up. *That* background might have produced, in someone like Natali, an important filmmaker. At present he is making films that look like the work of someone who has never seen a film before (and I am not talking about technical knowhow, which, as Chabrol was fond of telling everyone, an intelligent person can master within 24 hours).

Nothing is clearly unreleasable; another modest new Canadian film, *Twist*, by Jacob Tierney, clearly deserves far more attention than it has received and should be released both theatrically and on DVD. An updating of Dickens set in present-day Toronto, centred on the Artful Dodger (now a teenage male prostitute) who rescues and falls in love with Oliver, the film has certain weaknesses (Fagin's suicide seems insufficiently motivated and prepared, the ending needs rethinking), but it remains continuously interesting, frequently moving, very well acted and directed: a creditable first feature, revealing a talent that deserves the nurturing and support it probably won't get from the Canadian funding agencies, which seem in general to fund projects rather than talent. *Twist* deserves a place among the select group of Canadian films (*Kitchen Party*, *rollercoaster*) about the problems of growing up and maintaining some kind of integrity in the contemporary world—a group that stands in impressive opposition to the current Hollywood 'youth' movies.

I approached *Falling Angels* with great interest, because it is the second feature of Scott Smith, whose feature debut *rollercoaster* I would certainly place among the half-dozen best Canadian films I have seen. At its festival screening I was (inevitably, I suppose) somewhat disappointed. Fortunately the film received a swift (though very brief) release and a special screening at Toronto's Cinematheque, and I was able to resee it (alone of the films I am writing on) and do it more justice. *rollercoaster* had its premiere in the 1999 Toronto festival. Anyone with open eyes and a serious interest in cinema could have seen evidence of a potentially major talent, yet we have had to wait four years for Smith's next film. In a healthy film culture he would have had no difficulty in securing

finance for at least two films in between—it being of first importance for a fledgling director to keep working. *rollercoaster* is 'a Scott Smith film' in the fullest sense of the word: he wrote the screenplay from his own idea, produced and cast the film, directed it. It comes across as an intensely personal work, and a film of considerable complexity and subtlety, depth and intelligence. *Falling Angels* is adapted from a Barbara Gowdy novel, with a screenplay by Esta Spalding. The film is splendidly realized: Smith shows himself again a born filmmaker and a sensitive and resourceful director of actors, the performances being consistently detailed and alive. It should certainly convince any funding agency of Smith's potential. As far as I am aware only one other Gowdy work, a short story, has so far been filmed: *Kissed*, of dire memory. What I find most interesting (and most promising) about *Falling Angels* are the film's deviations from its source. By the end of Gowdy's novel, all potential seems to have been closed off: every relationship, lesbian or straight, has failed, the father has thrown himself off Niagara Falls, we are left with a debilitating sense of futility, supported by a somewhat condescending and superior attitude to the film's characters. In Smith's film, although no promises are offered us, every relationship is allowed to remain open and the father returns (chastened and improved, perhaps?) to the family circle. I have no information as to whether these changes (which are consistent over the film's entire spectrum of relationships) were Smith's or the screenwriter's, but they are consistent with the spirit that allowed a faint note of hope and renewal to qualify the bleak end of *rollercoaster*. Smith is currently preparing a film about the effects of a gay marriage on a family. I hope we shall not have to wait another four years before we are allowed to see it.

Ra'anan Alexandrowicz's *James' Journey to Jerusalem* (Israel) and Jafar Panahi's *Crimson Gold* (Iran) both paint extremely unflattering portraits of their respective countries. The latter attracted a great deal of attention, the former very little, partly because Panahi is already an established and admired director, but partly perhaps because in Iran you make a film like *Crimson Gold* at the cost of your future and at risk of possible prosecution, whereas Israel, whatever one may think of its current policies, at least appears to

allow freedom of speech. *Crimson Gold* is also the more original, idiosyncratic and complex film; as it seems almost certain to get a release, at least on DVD, I shall postpone writing on it until I know it better. *James' Journey* is more predictable but nonetheless striking in its uncompromising presentation of a culture corrupt from top to bottom. The corruption, however, is the habitual and inevitable corruption of capitalism, the worst of all possible social systems short of Stalinist or Nazi totalitarianism, built upon power structures and the nurturing of greed, competition and mean-mindedness—as we all I think know but seem curiously reluctant to do anything about it, entangled in its web of false and empty promises. It's by no means clear that James' journey would have had a happier conclusion if he'd made it to the USA. James is a beautiful, innocent and idealistic young Zulu, sent from his African village on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. On his arrival in Israel he is abruptly sucked into what amounts to slave labour, gradually succumbs to the pervasive corruption as the only means of extricating himself, then ultimately—redeems himself by an act of rebellion, as a result of which he does, finally, get to Jerusalem—in a prison van.

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I take it that the only reason *The School of Rock* was selected for the festival was that it had Richard Linklater's name on it—which is also the only reason I am writing briefly about it. A film of no discernible distinction (it seems barely distinguishable from today's 'standard' Hollywood 'teen audience' products) in which Jack Black begins to outstay his welcome about ten minutes in and returns in virtually every scene, it somewhat recalls the Mickey Rooney/Judy Garland movies of the late 30s/40s (*Babes in Arms*, etc.) about kids putting on a show, except that they were marginally more 'progressive' in that the kids (somewhat older) managed without Mr. Black's encouragement. *School of Rock*'s only noticeable advance on its model is as a mindlessly celebratory contribution to the now probably irreversible disintegration of what we used to think of as our civilization, without offering any positive suggestion as to what might replace it. Linklater may have agreed to make it as a way of raising money for the recently completed sequel to his finest work, *Before Sunrise*. I don't

think this excuses *School of Rock* (what could?) but I prefer to believe it to meditating upon the horrifying possibility that he actually *wanted* to make it.

I have nothing exactly *against* rock music, which clearly today has the function of permitting teenagers a transitory release from the pervasive brutalities of life under contemporary corporate capitalist culture. The politicized rock of the 60s and 70s had a potential value beyond this, but (as far as I can see) the function of rock music today is not to rouse the young to revolution (or even to get them to the voting polls), but to provide yet another distraction from the kind of thinking that might make revolution possible: in other words, it has become annexed to the culture's dominant trends as yet another weapon in the arsenal of our formidable enemy. I might concede that rock is capable of encompassing the entire range of human emotion, expression and creativity from A to B, generously leaving the rest of the alphabet to Monteverdi, Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Berlioz, Wagner, Mahler, Schonberg, Nielsen, Sibelius, Janacek and Stravinsky (to name but a few). The film tells its youth audience (no intelligent adult would voluntarily sit through it) from the mouth of Mr. Black that rock will 'blow classical music out your ass', reducing the cumulative cultural legacy of centuries literally to a piece of shit. Nothing in the film counters or qualifies this statement, so perhaps we must accept that Linklater endorses it (and I always thought of *Before Sunrise* as one of the most 'Mozartian' of films...).

The film offers some crude and obvious satire on contemporary upper-crust education as its endorsement of Mr. Black's position. The education of the young today is (necessarily) geared to preparing them for the dog-eat-dog world of corporate capitalism, with its systematic destruction of every aspect of life not relevant to the making of money. I would be all in favour of a film that suggested that education might have other, higher aims. But *The School of Rock* shows not the least interest in such a project. To suggest that rock music today can still be some liberating force is, quite simply, to ignore its current usefulness in the marketplace of consumerism, the stench of which we breathe in daily. Meanwhile, we are losing our past, and 'If we lose the past, we lose the future'.

Amos Gitai's *Alila*

BY FLORENCE JACOBOWITZ

Alila, screened at the Toronto International Film Festival 2003, is Amos Gitai's latest film set in contemporary Tel Aviv. It follows *Eden* and *Kedma*, two films which rethink the period surrounding the founding of the state of Israel and are Gitai's attempts to demystify an idealized historical vision of those years. Gitai's films are personal expressions of an artist who has produced a body of work that dramatizes the sensibility of feeling exiled or alienated, even, at times, within one's homeland. A revisionist perspective of the heightened idealism that followed the momentous founding of the state and the concept of Jewish national unity is the baseline for Gitai's meditations on contemporary Israeli life- on religious fanaticism, the emptiness of a secular society characterized by hedonism and materialism, racial tensions, displacement. Disillusionment with the officially sanctioned national vision permeates these films; they acknowledge the many differences-cultural, religious, racial, generic- that defies a homogenous idea of Israeli identity and accomplishment. Gitai has taken the role of the gadfly artist who is critical of the socio/political realities of the country about which he cares deeply. Although Israel has not always welcomed this point of view (Gitai

left Israel for Paris following the controversy surrounding his documentary *Field Diary* 1982), it is nonetheless a healthy sign that Israel's most acclaimed filmmaker can use the cinema as a forum for critical discussion and dissent.

Alila in Hebrew means the plot (as in narrative construction; the chain of parts that make up the whole). The film is presented as a black comedy (adapted from a novel, *Returning Lost Loves*, by Yehoshua Kenaz) that is centered on an apartment building in Nehushtan, a working class neighborhood in Tel Aviv that borders Jaffa. There are a number of interwoven narrative threads of which the plot is composed. Although it follows the stories of a number of characters, its plot is less defined by character or interiority as it is by situation and thematic ideas. The film is about the transgression of boundaries, the difficulties of sharing social or communal space, a changing national landscape where foreign workers make up a tangible and ignored stratum of Israeli society, generational conflict, the disillusionment with the expectation to commit wholeheartedly and willingly to national security and defense, changing gender relations, the loss of privacy. Though not as accomplished, in some ways Gitai's film is like Godard's *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* 1966, where the subject is Parisian society and culture at a particular social moment and the characters articulate the artist's questions and ruminations on contemporary life.



Also with Godard, the result can sometimes be uneven but parts can be exhilarating, particularly in the way style is used (for which the director of photography, Renato Berta deserves acknowledgement). The film is architectural, composed of a series of long takes/ sequence shots (in the press kit Gitai states that each scene is composed of one shot and the film has forty in total), often with a fluid-moving camera that traverses walls and boundaries and can allow for a contemplative spectatorial position. These shots are often characterized by saturated colour (accompanied by a sophisticated aural soundtrack), which is remarkably beautiful. Many of the film's images remain imprinted in one's memory, like the shots of Tel Aviv traffic, the interior of a shoe store or café, an exterior shot of a tree-lined street corner. Gitai's commitment to the country is evident in the beauty of these shots. The opening sequence shot from the interior of Ezra/Uri Klauzner's car is particularly exemplary. The camera shifts between the father and son's discussion in the front seat about the son Eyal's fears and hesitations of being unable to complete the mandatory army service and the father's reassurances that it is a normal trajectory and rite of passage that everyone manages to get through, but then is sidetracked by the tumult of city life and the signs and sounds that seem to distract the camera's attention. The sounds also shift with the changing scenes outside the window and the result is an imprint of Tel Aviv life that foregrounds the interconnectedness of story, space and location.

Gitai mentions the "constant penetration of intimate space in each cell of private life" (press kit), which characterizes both the film and modern social life, particularly in Israel. The film dramatizes this through its location, an apartment building that provides a nexus for the lives and interests that cross paths. Ezra's ex-wife Mali/Hanna Laslo lives there and their story revolves around their son Eyal who fails to report to his army unit and disappears. Ezra is a contractor who has been hired by Ronit/ Ronit Elkabetz, a shrill policewoman, and her husband, to build an illegal flat in a space designated for storage. (He is living, temporarily, in his truck in the parking spot that belongs to Mali, with his construction crew of Chinese workmen, who are without work permits). This construction infuriates an

elderly Holocaust survivor Schwartz, who resides in an apartment with his housekeeper Linda, because of the noise, dust and mess and the illegal nature of the encroachment. He tries to solicit the interest of an idiosyncratic neighbour Aviram who lives alone but lacks the older man's civic integrity and vision of the building as a collective space. Schwartz is also offended by the cries of Gabi/Yael Abecassis, who is conducting a daytime affair with Hezi/ Amos Lavie in an apartment rented exclusively for their sexual encounters. The Gabi/Hezi relationship is defined by anonymity and secrecy as per Hezi's demands that she not interact with anyone in the building. Gabi arrives and leaves in a disguise (black Lulu-like wig, sunglasses and trench coat) that allows her both to be anonymous and to 'announce' her new identity as a woman negotiating a relationship on purely sexual terms. Her screams are a form of acknowledgement of her experiment in pure physicality. The individual characters sometimes intersect. Mali, for instance, is a friend of Gabi's (they shop together or meet in cafés). The parameters of the friendship are never fully explained but in one scene, the two discuss Gabi's affair as she tries on a pair of boots. Gabi leaves the store nonchalantly and commands Mali to pay for them; when Mali meets her one evening in a café, she has on an almost identical coat, which suggests Mali's vicarious sharing of Gabi's glamour and heightened sexual adventure. Mali's sometime young lover Ilan/Liron Levo is also a friend of her ex-husband Ezra. Ilan helps Ezra search for his son Eyal, and he leases the flat in the building to Hezi.

Some of the narrative blocks or cells are more nuanced and fully realized, like the Ezra/Mali/Eyal story which frames the narrative and creates its supporting structure. Some of the others are less well developed though the female characters are the most memorable (the Gabi/Hezi relationship which ends, finally on Gabi's terms, or the policewoman whose excess stands in marked contrast to some of the other more subtly defined characters). One of the highlights of the film is its contemplation of foreign Asian workers, particularly in the character Linda, Schwartz's housekeeper, but also in the Chinese crew whom Ezra initially intends to exploit (he brags to his son to watch him whittle down their price, which he fails to do) but later defends and cares

for, arguing for them and the invisible families they support when the police round them up for deportation. The moments when Ezra tries to communicate with them on the construction site are humorous but become strangely touching as their relationship develops (in part because of their shared accommodation in Ezra's truck). Linda, Schwartz's housekeeper, is also given a number of privileged long takes where one watches her playing a small electric organ, cleaning the apartment or caring for Schwartz when he returns from his temporary stay in hospital. In one of these shots Linda is seated at the table and the news comes on announcing a significant event and Linda switches to a station playing music, which seems to underline her distance and alienation from the exigencies of Israeli life. (These meditative long takes reminded me of the long takes of the disabled woman who cleans up and maintains the movie theatre in Tsai Ming-liang's *Goodbye Dragon Inn* which also screened at this year's festival. They share the same sense of contemplation and melancholy.) The attention given these foreign workers who are invisible not only in Israel but also in a large number of countries is a necessary reminder of the labours they provide and challenges the concept of national homogeneity.

The film offers a number of narrative resolutions. A heavy rainfall causes water to back up in the newly constructed illegal apartment, which rejuvenates Schwartz (who shares his glee with his neighbour Aviram). Gabi, having ended her relationship with Hezi, receives help from Ezra who assists her with a fuse and power outage in her flat. She now appears without her wig and costume, dressed in a white shirt, rain soaked. She is metaphorically renewed and reconnected to humanity. The most important resolution, however, is Ezra's understanding of Eyal and his reluctance to serve in the military. Ezra articulates his perception of a changing reality in Israel, and his realization that it is no longer appropriate to commit to its defense without question.

Gitai observes the ideological permutations that have taken place since the founding of the state. The population has become highly diverse over the years and less cohesive. Besides Arabs and Jews there are Jews of Ashkenazic origins (European), Sephardic Jews (Oriental,

North African) foreign workers and immigrants from many different countries. This contributes to a wide range of attitudes towards gender, personal relationships, social commitment, shared space. There are generational differences that evidence changing conceptions of one's relationship to the nation. Schwartz is of a generation that acted for the greater collectivity. Ezra inherits this sensibility but through his son learns that successive generations no longer share an unquestioning patriotism. As Ezra tells his son, "I can't explain but some day you'll go abroad and even if you're having fun it'll feel alien to you; you'll miss the language, these streets, these smells, this whole mess ('balagan'). It's our country, Eyali. I can't explain it." This is one of the film's loveliest moments, and it undercuts the stridency and despair evident in some of Gitai's other films. It invites the viewer to think about a contemporary moment in a nation's history in terms that sometimes defy politics.

Drifters

SMOKING AND MOPING ON THE MAINLAND

BY SUSAN MORRISON

"Is anyone in China happy?"

The above question, asked recently by a genuinely perplexed viewer on an internet conference dedicated to Chinese films, prompted one response that not only listed a series of depressing themes the writer proposed as common to mainland Chinese films, but in addition stated emphatically that it was precisely these subject matters that caused her to flee to the happier climes of Hong Kong cinema.¹ While subsequent postings sought to refine and clarify the position as being a concern with the distribution of Chinese films rather than their production, one of the issues being opened up here is the age-old debate concerning the nature of cinema itself: is its end to be diversionary escapist entertainment or to be an authentic expression of precisely that quotidian existence that is people's real experience of life as lived, and if that includes suffering, so be it.

Wang Xiaoshuai's *Drifters*, screened at

Drifters



this year's Toronto International Film Festival, is an example of the latter approach to cinematic content. Together with its complementary snail-paced tempo and languorous style, *Drifters*, it seems to me, would be an excellent example for the above debate. At the press screening I attended, over half the audience had fled before the film ended. Not that this is unusual, of course. My experience has been that, for the most part, the festival press (and those concomitant others who have access to these preview screenings), pressed with the need to see as many films as possible over a short period of time, have little patience with films that are slow-paced and evocative. Which is a pity. Films like *Drifters* require a lot of investment on the part of the viewer because there doesn't seem to be a lot going on for most of the time. Nevertheless, those who manage to stick it out are (in this case, as well as countless others) rewarded in the end with a filmic experience that lasts well beyond the closing credits.

The cinematic style of *Drifters* is very different from Wang Xiaoshuai's earlier films that have screened in Toronto; *Frozen* (1995) and *Beijing Bicycle* (2001). With its emphasis on long static shots where not much seems to happen, its reliance on mood conveyed through glances and gestures rather than dialogue and its sense of quiet desperation punctuated by both over and under-determined actions, *Drifters* most closely resembles an homage to the Taiwanese school of cinema of Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Tsai Ming-Liang. As with these two

directors, mood is everything.

Rather than American-style narrative action, this film's cinematic time is filled with contemplative moments- the "smoking and moping" alluded to in the title of this piece. However, I want to stress the fact that I do not intend that to be a pejorative description. Quite the opposite. To address criticism of the "emptiness" of these moments, I would like to offer the following. As with abstract art, there are two possibilities for reading these scenes. One is that they're empty cinematically, i.e. there's nothing there. The other position- and the one I prefer to take- is that these seemingly empty moments are in fact full of meaning. But it is the work of the viewer (if they're open and willing) to fill in these narrative lacunae with internal reflections and meditations on the possibilities open to the character/s. The result is the opening up for the viewer of a concentrated "living-through- the-protagonist" that goes beyond the conventions of filmic identification.

In Wang Xiaoshuai's film, the protagonist, Hong Yunsheng, nicknamed Er di or 'Younger Brother' (the Chinese title of the film²), is a young man recently returned from a failed attempt at illegally emigrating to the United States. While this venture has made him a kind of celebrity in his small town in the south eastern province of Fujian, he spends his days in idleness. Most of the time he sits around and smokes, staring into space, indolently refusing to get involved or get a job or even have much contact with anyone else. His older brother, married

but childless, supports him but is constantly on his case about his lack of initiative and resolve. Hong has a friend, Liang, and a relationship with a young woman who is a part of a visiting troupe of Shanghai Opera performers. He sneaks her into his brother's house at night for sex, but he doesn't seem to be overly committed to her...in fact, near the end of the film, we discover with some surprise that he doesn't know her name...when he finally asks, she tells him diffidently to call her "little girl". She is much more committed to him, as is made clear later on when she steals money from the Opera Company to help him flee once more to the US.

Into this monotonous existence comes a crisis for Hong: Fusheng, the son that he fathered in the US, is being brought to China by the child's grandfather to be shown off to the local townsfolk. We discover that this man was the owner of the restaurant where Hong worked while an illegal immigrant in the US. The condition of his continued employment at the restaurant became his giving up all paternal rights to the child. When Hong broke this contract by seeing his son, the restaurant owner turned him in to the police and Hong was summarily deported. At first, however, news of the visit of his son seems to have little effect on Hong himself; he continues to smoke and mope as before. However, his older brother and his friend Liang try to convince him that he should see the boy. Pushed by them into action, Hong makes several attempts to see Fusheng, but is painfully and pathetically rebuffed by the mother's family. It is once again not Hong but Older Brother who takes it on himself to resolve this impasse by kidnapping Fusheng (perhaps as a stand-in for the child Older Brother and his wife were unable to have?). He then directs Hong to take the boy to the grave of their parents to pay the respect due them. Hong takes Liang and his girl friend along with them. However Fusheng is frightened and withdrawn throughout the trip, rejecting his father's tentative attempts at reconciliation. And once again it is not Hong but someone else- in this case, the young woman who has accompanied them -who breaks the ice by performing acrobatic tricks which amuse the child and soften his resistance. The ensuing idyllic mood established by shots of them happily cavorting in play on the beach ends abruptly when Hong remorsefully

returns the boy to his grandfather's house. As he leaves, Fusheng poignantly calls Hong "father", recognizing the relationship between them. But that is the last time they are to be together. The police come to Older Brother's restaurant to investigate the kidnapping; things turn ugly, a fight breaks out and both brothers are arrested. Intervention on the part of a community worker gets the kidnapping charges dropped, but the assault charges stay and they are imprisoned for 2 weeks. When he is released, Hong discovers that his son has returned to the US with his grandfather. There appears to be nothing left for him to do.

Hong's attempts to have a relationship with his son would seem to be the central (melodramatic) narrative strand of *Drifters*. However, the film is framed structurally with an opening and closing that parallel each other in classic film form tradition. *Drifters* opens in darkness with shots of unidentified people dressed in dark clothing filing through a narrow space to eventually end up at a sort of shrine where they light incense sticks. A young couple sit together in what appears to be a boat hold, the woman eats a piece of fruit, the man smokes a cigarette. We never see these two again, but we do learn later on in an oddly non-dramatic kind of way who they were: Hong's friends, Monkey and Jan; what they were doing: trying to get to the United States illegally; and what happened to them; toxic fumes emanating from the hold of the ship killed them along with all the other stowaways on board. Their fate is dropped into the narrative of the film as a bit of news told to Hong by Liang as a fact to be absorbed and accepted as a reality about which nothing be done. *Drifters* ends with the same structural sequence of shots, including the incense-burning, the apple eating and the cigarette smoking. However, this time, it is with surprise that we recognize that it is Hong and his girl friend who are performing these roles.

With the recognition of this structural conceit, the film's thematic emphasis expands to a much broader inquiry/investigation of the question of the possibility of happiness for Hong. At various moments throughout the film, almost as background noise to the events we are watching unfold in front of us, there is the voice of a radio announcer reporting the latest news concerning

China's 1992 attempts to enter the World Trade Organization. For Hong, however, the promise of potential national prosperity that this entry holds out are empty and meaningless. He refuses to recognize any future possible for himself in China; when his friend Liang tells him that he is moving to another town where work is available, Hong rejects his suggestion that he go too. Although ejected ignominiously from the US, he would rather take his chances by attempting to re-enter the country illegally rather than trying to make things work for him at home. It's as if he just doesn't know what he wants, or what will make him happy. What he does know is that what he has in China is not enough. Deportation or even death by misadventure are preferable to staying behind.

The aporia that exists for *Drifters'* protagonist, Hong, arises from a multiplicity of causes: economic, political, social, psychological. No matter how difficult it is for an audience brought up to expect that all films must end happily, the reality is that life doesn't work that way. Douglas Sirk used to talk about the happy endings of his American films as being open to be read in the opposite way: that an astute viewer would know that the inevitable tragedy implicit in the filmic narrative forecloses on the probability of the happy ending. Wang Xiaoshuai's *Drifters* reminds us that there's more to film than what we've come to so readily expect and accept.

1 The first email was posted on Jan. 28, 2004 on Chinese Cinema List; the second, by Erika Young on Jan. 30, 2004. The list of common themes covered tongue-in-cheek style were Communism, Imperialism, Psychological Repression, Spiritual Repression, Political Repression, Spousal Repression, Number-One-Son Firstborn Male Repression, Number-One-Son Firstborn Male Eunuch Repression, and Jealous Farmer Repression.

2 I think that *Er di/Younger Brother* is an more fitting title for the film than *Drifters*. It positions the protagonist firmly within his community and culture in its allusion to his secondary status and fixed identity. While the title *Drifters* refers to his rootlessness, it's more general and doesn't really allude to the complex content of the film.



So Far Away

Tabio's *So Far Away*

BY SCOTT FORSYTH

This is Cuban director Juan Carlos Tabio's second film since his collaborations with the late, and revered, director Tomas Gutierrez Alea. *Strawberry and Chocolate* (1993) and *Guantanamara* (1995) remain among the most interesting and challenging films of Alea's distinguished career. Each was a popular hit in Cuba and proved important to political and cultural debate and controversy. Both continued Cuban cinema's tradition of comic critique of bureaucracy and intolerance within the Revolution. *Strawberry and Chocolate's* story of a friendship between a naive young Party stalwart and a sophisticated, unwillingly dissident gay man received considerable attention, including North American theatrical distribution and an Oscar nomination. The film sharply indicts the Revolution's discrimination against gays, even if its decidedly socialist humanist orientation did not fit well with first world gay identity politics. *Guantanamara* updates and reworks the

satire of funeral bureaucracy in Alea's classic *Death of a Bureaucrat* (1966). Its daring mockery of ossified bureaucrats who just won't die ignited a fierce debate between elements of the revolutionary leadership and the filmmaking intellectuals of ICAIC, the Cuban Film Institute. As at several junctures in the complex history of the Cuban revolution's cultural politics, the filmmakers maintained a critical space within the revolution, a kind of cinematic civil society as one film historian has put it.

The Waiting List (2000) continued Tabio's satirical take on the Revolution and its difficulties in the post-Soviet Special Period. This comic fable of a cross-section of everyday Cubans caught in an endless queue in a bus station manages to combine a splendidly Bunuelian narrative twist with a soulful evocation of revolutionary spirit. Tabio's films consistently return to the utopian even when they are grounded in the material and ideological limitations of Cuban socialism. When I spoke to Tabio in September 2000 he was eloquently optimistic about the future of Cuban film production and sanguine about the artistic freedom he had experienced working on international co-productions.

He pointed out that this was the only possibility for Cuban writers and directors in these straightened times for socialist Cuba. (See *CineAction* 57)

Perhaps logically then, *So Far Away* is a satire about Cuban filmmakers making an international co-production and it is, of course, an international co-production; Tabio can't seem to help nipping at the hands of authority. The film is charming, seemingly slight but interestingly resonant. Like most of Tabio's films, it plays with narrative conventions; we are not always sure what realm of reality or fiction we are in and move confusingly between them. The film begins as a straightforward story of Cuban filmmakers pitching their film to Spanish co-producers. They are frustrated by expectations that Cuba can be reduced to a few clichés of oversexed Caribbeans with rhythm and these artists talk earnestly of making "a Cuban film with a Cuban perspective." But suddenly we are in another film with what seems to be wild permutations of the story we thought we inhabited. In this second tale, everything is overheated and we veer from melodrama to comedy and back, skewering familiar targets along the way. Prim Party dogmatists and fervent young revolutionaries, rich

Cuban exiles and opportunistic sexual tourism, even "fucking socialist realism," are all cleverly, movingly drawn and duly mocked. Suddenly again, we are in another story, weaving back and forth, this one filled with sexy young Cubans, dancing and playing, over-the-top Spanish drug dealers, adultery, death threats; all the ingredients of an attractive commodification of national stereotypes that an international co-production might demand from a Cuban film. The Cuban filmmakers intervene to tell us "No Cuban director would ever film it!" But, we are watching it and a proud Cuban director did make it; the paradoxical ethics of filmmaking within the entrepreneurial imperatives of the moment are subtly and thoughtfully laid out, without moralism or condescension.

Throughout the film, we are never quite sure what narrative world we are in or what the rules are. The artists want to make "a serious movie," but are caught in the apparently much less serious one they also seem to be writing as the movie moves along. This is the clever and popular modernism of many Cuban films, playing with narrative conventions amusingly, but seriously raising themes of personal and national identity and ethics. The evident difficulties and compromises of making a film within the strictures of globalized capitalist filmmaking are parodied while the film proceeds in a circuitous way to be nationally specific and true. The film concludes back in Cuba, the writers wrestling with the wild melodramas that seem to have taken over the film and their lives. We ponder memories and loss as intimate as well as collective drama. And conclude, almost shockingly, in hot-blooded melodrama again. Love and lust, heat and passion, everything an international co-production might hope for from a Cuban film. But of course, it is also "a Cuban film with a Cuban perspective." Tabio has made an entertaining and self-reflexive film about Cuban filmmaking now, that includes limitations and restrictions, stereotypes true and false and a confusion of narrative possibilities. The first world may have a stereotype of poor Cubans precariously adrift on a socialist island in an ocean of capitalist globalization; in *So Far Away*, those Cubans find a way to tell, and live, their own stories.

The Brown Bunny

BY DION TUBRETT

A Vincent Gallo Production. Produced, Written, and Directed by Vincent Gallo. Cinematography and Editing by Vincent Gallo. Production Design, Sound, and Music by Vincent Gallo. Starring Vincent Gallo and Chloe Sevigny. After its horrendous reception at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2003, with claims of it being the worst film ever entered into competition (coupled with Gallo's misrepresented apology), *The Brown Bunny* appeared at the Toronto International Film Festival with much expectation, hesitation, and speculation. Yet the version of the film that screened in September was nearly 30 minutes shorter than its original cut. Having not seen the original Cannes' cut of the film I cannot comment on it here, and Gallo has indicated this longer cut was in fact unfinished, but the film I saw definitely merits (positive) attention: it is a wonderfully poetic meditation on love and loss.

Filmed in a very minimalist style, with the intimate feel of 16mm, the film concerns Bud Clay (Gallo) who has days to travel across America for the next race in his professional motorcycle circuit. On his long and lonely drive to this next race in California he has various encounters with people that seem as empty as the road before him: women who join him in brief sexually charged escapades; the senile parents of his childhood sweetheart and estranged lover Daisy (Sevigny). Through these encounters, his true goal reveals itself: he never escapes the memory of his love Daisy. His road trip across the country keeps him obsessively centred on this person who has abandoned him. The long take emphasizes his solitude and nomadic life while the circular tracks he drives, overwhelmingly evident in the film's opening sequence, provide a thematic connection to the obsessive thinking that drives him simultaneously toward and away from Daisy—always circling her.

The reflection Bud Clay experiences through his meditative motorcycle riding, and the entire cross country road trip, is communicated through the lingering camerawork and near total absence of emotion in any of the sparse characters. His lingering aimlessness, paradoxically

connected with his obsessive quest to reunite with Daisy, is highlighted both literally and symbolically in his motorcycle racing. The overall effect of the camerawork and compositions, often shot through dirty car windshields, is to draw the viewer into the same emotional and psychological space of the central character: a sense of unspoken loss.

Every encounter in the film seems to be a way that Bud bridges this absence, either physically or psychologically, yet he always tries to outrace the fear of his own solitude that the film can never let him escape. He cannot let himself escape it. As the film ultimately reveals, he does not want to let himself escape. He binds himself to Daisy, a tangible absence until the film's climax. But in his connection to Daisy he only experiences an emptiness shared in his racing or cross country driving, a sense of vacant loss we are implicated in. Bud demands this pain. It is the symbol of his responsibility; and it is his responsibility that is questioned when he finally meets Daisy.

The film takes great care to show the mundane activities of his trip with as much care as those of greatest importance—his ultimate reunion with Daisy. The film's meditative pace and absence of a continued sense of narrative causality, where Bud's actions are until the conclusion without clear reasons, admirably join the film's form with its content. The film's solemn tone is established through this combination of pacing and seemingly indiscriminate coverage. Its stylistic affinities tie it loosely to Italian Neorealism through the lens of the generic American Road Movie, but soaked in a dark and tormented psychology. Perhaps its rendition of human psychology is too true: for at the emotional heart of loss is emptiness, a tangible lack. It is nothing.

The film's title gathers different meanings through the film. But even as it gains multiple meanings it still maintains an ethereal and ambiguous sense. The first clue to the title's meaning comes in his visit to Daisy's parents. While talking to them in the kitchen her pet, a brown bunny, is featured prominently in the scene. Bud reminds them who he is and continues to probe them for information of Daisy's whereabouts. Her brown bunny is a marker for her, a symbol of her, the last remnant of her still kept by her aging parents. It is the last physical sign he has of her presence. But as he heads to

California for his next race memories of his youth, and his love with Daisy, come flooding back. He remembers a story when they were much younger of a brown bunny, a chocolate candy gift, that she ate too fast and vomited. And the taste of vomit was on her lips. This memory subsequently connects to another he has in the film's last act, of his last kiss with her before their climactic meeting in the hotel room. "The brown bunny" takes on more and more importance as the film unfolds: as a symbol of his loss, and perhaps even comfort; their youth; their innocent love; and with the film's final revelation, their ignorant damage to one another.

The controversy surrounding the film erupted from its climax: an extended sequence of fellatio in one long take. Yet the sequence, apparently edited down since its Cannes screening, has a function within the narrative more than inciting opposition or inflaming ideas of 'standards': the passion of their encounter solidifies their connection and Bud's reaction to Daisy immediately afterward shows the tension that is their relationship's dynamic. The film's minimalist aesthetic is carried over into

the presentation of the sex act. Preserving the act within the frame actually adds to the unemotional sense that saturates the film. It is also not coincidental that this moment of 'release' is when Bud can at least temporarily and partially let go of the guilt and pain for his separation from Daisy, a separation that their temporary meeting at the film's end can never attempt to heal.

Opposition to the film was present on multiple fronts during its premiere: the graphic presentation of sex and the egomaniacal presence of its creative force in Gallo being the most pressing. The first objection is easily dismissed in viewing the sequence within its aesthetic context. A somewhat similar instance is found with David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996) where sex and sexuality are controversially presented but are required by the narrative. In *Crash* the near mechanical interaction of bodies caused a sensation upon its release but the presentation was very much tied to the psychology of its characters. *The Brown Bunny* utilizes the physical sexual act in a similar and artistically responsible manner. The second objection is less easy to counter. As evidenced by its opening credits and

the orientation of the narrative it is quickly recognized as a Vincent Gallo film. His total presence has led to some amount of snickering (actually audible in the screening I attended!) but I feel this is unjustified. In a continued age of films by committee aimed at the largest and most financially rewarding demographic where the same structure that earned the most money last time is reused, this production benefits from its personal nature. And while the film has no explicit aspirations toward political or social issues, as an intimately personal creation that succeeds through Gallo's sole control, it does provide a haunting study in human relationships and the spectre of alienation that pervades our contemporary landscape. The film thwarts convention but its bravery and honesty, in a reflective and meditative spirit, ought to be applauded not harassed for its preoccupations and style: it is an unlit journey through the human psyche aimlessly lead by loss.

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The Brown Bunny

LETTERS

To the editors,

It was with some surprise that I read the letter from Alexander Jacoby in *Cineaction* 62, responding to my article "Three Japanese Actresses of the 1950s" which had appeared in *Cineaction* 60. I was surprised because I had not been invited to respond to Jacoby's letter, but also because it was accompanied by an editorial comment from Robin Wood which endorsed Jacoby's view and added his own critique of my article. Usually editors defend their authors, or invite them to defend themselves, and I was dismayed to see such unprofessional editorial practice in this major Canadian film studies publication.

I know that it is difficult, on the 100th anniversary of Ozu's birth, to accept that there may be criticisms of his films. However, I like to believe that even great artists may be complicit with ideologies that deserve critique. People have been debating Ozu's values and politics for decades, and one of the beautiful things about his cinema is just how open it is to different readings and interpretations. As Robin Wood says in his introduction to *Cineaction* 62, film criticism should be about values, the implication being that critics may have their different values. Coming to terms with the "values" of historical works from another culture is a challenging task, and one of my critical goals in the essay in question is to try to shed light on the values of gender in Japanese cinema of the 1950s.

In my analysis of Hara Setsuko's acting I wanted to stress the ambivalence of her expressions. In my example from *Early Summer*, the point was that, despite her final decision to marry the man of her choice, Hara does not express happiness. Jacoby most eloquently describes the closing shots of the film, depicting the loneliness of her parents, confirming that the question of a woman's marriage in Ozu's films is less about the woman's choice than about the social order that is affected by her decision—and which her decision tends to represent. I choose to read Ozu as a conservative, and I wanted to elaborate on the effects of gender that are conveyed within his conservatism, and to situate those effects in the context of the postwar Japanese discourse on femininity.

In the postwar Japanese context, the fact that Hara is never seen to be happily married in Ozu's films is very significant. To suggest that this refusal of marriage constitutes a "resistance" to the institution of marriage, as Wood does, is a familiar attempt to impose Western "liberatory" views of women's rights onto a culture in which marriage, especially the love-match, was a goal for women. Marriage was hardly regarded as "an institution for the curbing of women's freedom," and it is unlikely that either Ozu or his female audiences would have understood a critique of marriage to be a political gesture. As the "eternal virgin" in the popular imagination, Hara was always on the threshold of marriage, a position strongly reinforced by Ozu's films. And this is a position of sadness, of unfulfilled desires, symbolic of the losses that accompanied the new opportunities that many women, including Hara herself, were experiencing during the decades of Hara's career.

If Jacoby and Wood want to hold on to their progressive readings of Ozu, they are entirely entitled to. However, I am disappointed that my point was lost on them. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to clarify my interpretation. I like to think that the meanings of films such as Ozu's are always in flux, and will vary from one to viewer to another according to their values. The letters page of issue 62 was revealing of how critics can become possessive of these

meanings, and are threatened by alternative perspectives and readings of canonical films. I hope that *Cineaction* continues to promote critical debate and discussion, but I encourage you to do so in a more fair way than this latest exchange was published.

Catherine Russell
Concordia University

To the editors,

While I am grateful for your publishing my work on Malick, after reading the final published version I have discovered two mistakes that I wish to explain. The first mistake is mine and I apologise for this; the second mistake must have been made during the process of producing the magazine.

Mistake number 1: While revising the article for publication, I removed a handful of endnotes that I believed then were unnecessary. Unfortunately, I took out too many as I realise now that I do not acknowledge Paul Hillier's work early enough. In my earlier version, there was an endnote referring readers to Hillier's historical and musical description of *Annum per Annum*, on which I draw in the second paragraph of page four of *CineAction*. This endnote said 'for further information, see Hillier, p. 173'. The problem now is that my first reference to Hillier only comes after the description of the piece of music. This is my fault and I should have adjusted the text when I removed the endnotes. I believed then that I was acknowledging Hillier's work sufficiently; I don't think I am now.

Mistake number 2: My mistake is exacerbated by a missing quotation from Hillier and an accompanying missing endnote reference on page five. The printed endnotes include number five, which is the first reference to Hillier's book; but the quotation itself and the endnote reference are missing from the main text. It now reads as if Hillier is writing about the film, which he is not (in 1987); worse, it looks as if I am drawing my interpretation of the film's opening from Hillier, when all I take from Hillier is the historical and musical description of the piece—the interpretative work is my own. Furthermore, the published article misses out Hillier's important idea that Pärt's music invites us 'to stand apart from the world'. I include below the original of my text with the missing quotation and the endnote reference, although not the endnote itself, which readers can find on page fourteen of *CineAction* 62.

Pärt scholar, singer and conductor Paul Hillier notes the link between the Orthodox Church's use of repetitive rhythms in traditional chanting and Minimalism's use of non-narrative process structures and harmonic stasis. While acknowledging that the "the topic of spirituality in music is like quicksand", Hillier nonetheless summarises:

Pärt uses the simplest of means—a single note, a triad, words—and with them creates an intense, vibrant music that stands apart from the world, and beckons us to an inner quietness and an inner exaltation.[1]

The powerful dynamic of this opening chord transforms the disappearance of the crocodile under water, volume and scale launching a level and tone that the film will resume during the battles.

The crocodile's mouth seems to grin slyly as it slips without splash into the stagnant green water: it moves slowly although its threat comes from its ability to move quickly.

Yours faithfully,
Jacob Leigh

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